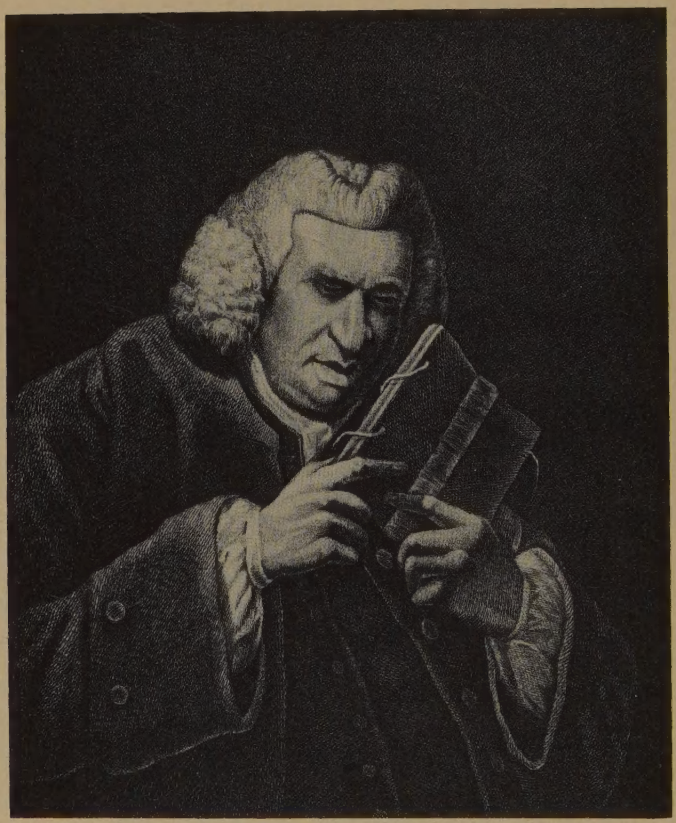
Doctor Johnson



Samuel Johnson LL.D.

From a Portrait by James Northcote R.A.

DOCTOR JOHNSON

A STUDY IN

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY HUMANISM

BY

PERCY HAZEN HOUSTON

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PREFACE

DOCTOR JOHNSON is not, perhaps, precisely the type of humanist so much needed in our present welter of opinions; but his personality is so impressive, his general ideas upon life are so sound, and his thoroughgoing common sense so refreshing, that an adequate study of his intellectual life may well become of very real value to many who are groping for permanent standards by which they may weigh the shifting sands of opinion. Humanism, the doctrine and the discipline which had its rise in the revival of classical scholarship in the Renaissance and took form in the following generations, is the truest and sanest force opposing the vagaries of our undisciplined democracy. A discussion of Johnson's position in this long tradition of conservative forces should illuminate many things concerned with our trying problems to-day.

It is the author's pleasure to acknowledge his indebtedness to certain men whose share in this work has not been inconsiderable. Professor George L. Kittredge of Harvard University habitually puts in his debt any student who comes in contact with him. Professor, now President, William A. Neilson had a chief formative influence upon the composition of this book. Professor Irving Babbitt was unusually generous in giving aid, both in the classroom and outside, to a

work that owes more to him than can easily be expressed. Finally, the author would wish to offer if he could some return for the unfailing kindness and the fine critical sense of his friend Robert M. Smith, Professor of English in the University of Wyoming, and formerly a colleague at the Naval Academy. The memorable nights in which this study was read chapter by chapter aloud to him, to be criticized rigorously and mercilessly, are among his most cherished recollections. If this book possesses any excellence as a study in modern humanism, a very large portion of the credit must be accorded to him.

Dr. G. Birkbeck Hill's extraordinarily fine editions of Boswell's *Life of Johnson;* Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* and Letters; and the *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, have been the texts used throughout. All references in the notes are to these editions, published by the Oxford University Press. Anyone who has had occasion to read into Johnsonian literature has found in them a perpetual delight and a perfect model of what editing should be.

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Doctor Johnson

CHAPTER I

A Word of Introduction

SOMEONE has said that Doctor Johnson was greater in Boswell's books than in his own. Dr. Johnson, the man of contrary qualities, the marvellous talker, the burly controversialist, who, as Goldsmith phrased it, "if his pistol missed fire, knocked you down with the butt-end of it," the man of strange and outlandish manners, has become a personal friend to multitudes of readers of the immortal biography. And very many of this generation of readers, who find Boswell too diffuse or who prefer to take their literary recreation through others' guidance, have grown familiar with him through Macaulay's witty though not very charitable paradoxes or Carlyle's imaginative re-creation of the hero. Indeed, the worthy Doctor, by the wonderful chance of having had men of genius as biographers, remains to-day one of the two or three outstanding figures in eighteenth-century letters, though most of us have scarcely more than turned the pages of his ponderous volumes.

This is a curious situation, and the result has been that we rejoice in one of the most interesting men in English literary history and neglect his intellectual eminence. That Johnson himself would have exploded with wrath at the bare thought of an immortality resting upon literary gossip and personal anecdote, at the expense of his serious labors, can be readily surmised. But this is precisely what has happened, and his fame as a really great critic of men and books has been obscured by what we may call an extra-literary reputation bestowed upon him by friends and enemies alike. Yet as the last in the succession of great humanists before the romantic

upheaval, which he foreshadowed and strove to meet; as the critic and historian of neo-classicism at a time when the old order was beginning to give way before new forces; and as a superb example of the strong-minded, morally earnest Englishman of intense personal convictions and deep-seated prejudices, he should be a figure of permanent interest to us.

By the middle of the century, when Johnson was rising on the literary horizon, the English people had already begun to awaken to the changing currents of thought and feeling which were preparing the way for what is usually called the romantic revolt of the first years of the next century. Men of letters were throwing off the yoke of a static and passionless literary ideal, which, by conventionalizing its forms of expression, had forced out of its great body of literature any genuine thought or feeling it may have originally possessed. As the hold of scholastic philosophy upon the mind of the intellectual world was finally broken by the first great revolt from authority, — the Renaissance, — so this modern literary scholasticism was in process of time obliged to yield to forces hostile to its very existence.

Revolution, political and industrial, no doubt hastened this intellectual revolt from the tyranny of tradition, but the increasing importance of the middle class as one of the chief elements in English life aided very greatly in breaking the hold of the ancient aristocratic conventions. And this fact becomes of more than usual interest to us when we consider that for over thirty years this middle class of England looked upon Johnson as its chief representative in the world of letters. It did not require many years after the publication of the *Dictionary* for the name and opinions of the great Dr. Johnson to be received with awe and grave respect in the households of England. He may in fact in a large degree be viewed as narrowing down to his grasp the varied thought of his age and stamping it with the impress of his personality

and his prejudices. It is true indeed that many of the best minds of the age remained outside the range of his influence; and a good portion of the changing thought of the latter half of the century was quite beyond his understanding and control. It needs no emphasis then to prove that Johnson represents the powerful, somewhat slow-moving, but massive, and upon the whole necessary and admirable, conservative spirit which distinguished the greater number of Englishmen of the period and remains one of their chief characteristics to-day. Carlyle's appellation, "The John Bull of Spiritual Europe," describes with some accuracy the temper of his mind.

The general characteristics of the man himself are too well known to require enumeration. His painful struggle against the stress of poverty and his slow rise to recognition as the most impressive figure in English letters had confirmed in him his strong but rigid emotions. His constitutional melancholy and dread of losing his reason, his hatred of solitude which drove him to seek companionship often under distressing conditions, his deeply religious nature, and his bitter self-reproaches, are all familiar to readers of Boswell. But above these peculiarities stand out a massive intellectual vigor and a moral integrity as among his chief qualities. Too much has been made, by Macaulay and others, of the entrancing nature of his conversation and the dullness of his published work. Johnson did not bind in close friendship men of the eminence of Burke, Reynolds, and Goldsmith merely because he proved himself an entertaining talker; nor was his hold upon the great English public any less accidental, for a literary dictatorship as complete as his own came to be, must find its great strength not only in a personality of unusual power but in an actual accomplishment in letters which could be regarded as of unusual worth.

Toward the various phases of the intellectual life of the day, Johnson maintained a consistent attitude. With his

feet planted firmly in the past, he remained through life a staunch Tory, doing less than justice to those "bottomless Whigs" who were endeavoring to effect some reform in the public life of the nation. To him the first Whig was the Devil, and he rested so strongly upon the rights of established authority that he chose to defend the Ministry against the American rebels. His political pamphlets, while always readable, are always wrong, revealing in full force the prejudices at the bottom of their author's nature. Prescription as a necessary basis for the life of society, and the acceptance of the Establishment in our religious lives, seemed to him fundamental in any sound social philosophy. So too in literature his very prejudices grew out of his refusal to question what experience had proved to be wise and true; consequently he in the main upheld the neo-classic tradition in face of the new ideas which he must have felt were eating away the life of what he held most dear. Johnson has in the annals of literature been known as the great Tory, and one need not make any astonishing admission in declaring this charge, if charge it be, to be essentially true.

But if Johnson were merely the conventional neo-classic critic fighting a losing battle against the coming years, he would lose half his charm to the student of the period. It is because his nature contained so many contradictory qualities, because so much of the new stands revealed in the old, because a great personality cannot be bound within a formula, that Johnson is a fascinating study. At the same time he expresses so clearly the ideals and purposes of a great age of literature, and so wise and true is so much of what he has to say on both life and letters, that a study of his intellectual life should repay the effort, both for its significance in the history of literature and for its intrinsic value to the student.

But we may go still further than this in asserting his worth to us to-day. Johnson needs to be placed beside Edmund

Burke as one of the great conservative forces of the eighteenth century. These two men, Burke and Johnson, take their places as the great humanists of the period — types of the humanism which turned to the total experience of mankind in the past for guidance in the troubled present; which accepted established institutions as the necessary basis for all social progress; which recognized a body of doctrine built up out of human experience as the surest guide to practice in the present; which valued the trained judgment and discipline of mind and character as the only basis of right living; and which distrusted innovation and the various naturalistic nostrums of the day. Burke's position in the humanistic tradition has long been clear; it is the aim of this study to bring into relief the qualifications which Johnson possessed to attain so high a position beside his friend.

CHAPTER II

An Account of Dr. Johnson's Reading

THE most salient fact to strike the attention of anyone who considers the nature of Johnson's contribution to critical thought is his position as the last of a long line of classical scholars, who received their initial impulse in the revival of learning and represented unbroken the neo-classic tradition during the three centuries of its rise and its gradual decline in the latter part of the eighteenth century. For this reason it is essential, before we can enter upon any study of his critical ideas and their application to literature, that we know something of his background of scholarship and the extent to which he accepted the great body of critical doctrine which had been built up before his time. No man can be studied quite free from his environment, least of all such a one as Johnson, who contains in himself so much of the past and upon that past has built the foundation of his thinking and his faith.

With the great humanists who followed in the wake of the revival of learning Johnson found himself in thoroughly congenial company. The immense impulse given to critical and textual scholarship by the rediscovery of classical literature had not yet exhausted itself by the time he was forming his scholarly tastes. The work of the sixteenth-century scholars not only laid the foundation of all subsequent criticism of the neo-classic type, but remained the basis of the great number of textual and exegetical commentaries which followed them. The Renaissance scholar-in-*us* had come to be known as a man of great learning in many branches of knowledge, who

by sheer weight of self-assumed authority asserted his judgments in literary and textual criticism, and was prepared to defend them against all comers. None too gentle in his methods, by force of self-assertion and the dogmatism characteristic of all who suddenly find absolute power granted them, he created for himself a dictatorship over the domain of letters from which he received the traditional homage that the laymen of every age are ready to pay to men of apparently universal knowledge. The mighty Julius Caesar Scaliger, for example, the prototype of all literary dictators, displayed the immense range of his reading in his *Poetics*, and this book, though continually attacked and defended, long remained the final word on the subject of literary criticism. Other scholars, men distinguished in many lines of activity, such as Hugo Grotius, the distinguished Dutch jurist, who proved himself a profound theologian and the best exegete of the day and found time to become one of the best modern masters of Latin verse, and Erasmus, the most important figure in the literature of Europe during the first half of the sixteenth century, are representative of the polymath, the leviathan of learning, dominating contemporary thought by means of his superior intellectual attainments. With the rise of neo-classicism in England, this tradition was carried over into that country also; and Ben Jonson and Dryden are the seventeenth-century examples of the man of learning who by his own accomplishment in letters gained the privilege of dictating how a performance should be judged and of laying down the laws of successful literary effort. They sat their time in the seat of authority above the listening senate, and in turn passed on the sceptre to Addison and Pope, whence it descended to Dr. Johnson, the great Cham of literature, in whose possession its glory blazed and died.

In the respect for learning on a great variety of subjects, and in its willingness to yield its judgment to men of recog-

nized authority in the field of criticism, the eighteenth century was not far behind its predecessors. It too was a century of learning; the tradition of Bentley remained, and such scholars as Porson and Dr. Parr and Bishop Lowth were not unworthy of the great past. But Johnson's qualifications to be a literary dictator were greater than theirs, for his impressive reputation as moralist and critic and his fame as a conversationalist had made him the accepted authority on matters of public taste, even to a degree on matters of national policy and statesmanship.[1] His learning was not exclusively literary, and Boswell records for us that he was versed in law, in medicine, even in agriculture, proving the effort he made to pursue his studies in many lines, with perhaps in view, as his ideal of the gentleman-scholar, the type of *l'honnête homme, qui ne se pique de rien*, who flourished in seventeenth-century France. He indeed is reported to have declared: "Perfect good breeding consists in having no particular mark of any profession, but a general elegance of manners."[2] Johnson may not have conformed in outward appearance to this type, but his humanism reached out toward it as a wholly realizable ideal.

A review of the sale catalogue of his library, published after his death, reveals the immense range of his reading in all sorts of subjects. While not primarily a scientist, he possessed some knowledge of astronomy, and he had improvised in his lodgings a small chemical laboratory by means of which he contrived to fight his enemy, solitude.[3] But he remained essentially the man of letters, and as he was the last of the great classical critics, so by position and attainments he was fitted to become the last example in England of the literary aristarch, before whose tribunal contemporary literature must receive its sentence of praise or blame.

1. *Bos.* III, 21, 22; I, 139, 436.
2. *Ibid.* II, 82.
3. *Ibid.* III, 398.

It is possible to point out with some definiteness to what extent he actually presided over the deliberations of literary councils. Arthur Murphy tells how in the days of his extreme poverty the denizens of Grub Street used to assemble before breakfast in levée at his bedside, where they received his advice in regard to their literary work.[1] Here Kit Smart, no more fond of clean linen than his benefactor, and Richard Savage may have established their claims on the good nature which did not fail them in more prosperous days. After he passed out into a more comfortable existence his house became a kind of academy; and indeed he has been called a sort of public oracle, whom everyone thought he had a right to visit and consult.[2] So also the society of the tavern, where "I dogmatise and am contradicted, and in this conflict of opinions I find my delight," [3] sharpened his conversational powers and prepared him for the rôle he was to play in the famous Club, in which he was to unite in friendship such notables as Burke and Reynolds, Goldsmith and Garrick. It was a wonderfully brilliant group of men who called Johnson friend; it would be difficult to discover one more brilliant in the whole range of literary history. The lively and witty society of the Thrales, which included such accomplished wits and scholars as Dr. Burney and the Italian Baretti, also did much to keep the intellectual fires burning in the latter years of his life. Altogether Johnson gathered about him the best of the intellectual life of the day, and varied and interesting must have been the topics tossed about among these gladiators in their meetings. Only the Magny dinners, typical of another and very different age and expressive of the intellectual life of the great Frenchmen, Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert, the Goncourts, Taine, and Renan, come to one's mind as worthy to be placed beside them.

The comparison between Johnson and his forerunners in the art of literary dictatorship cannot be pushed home too

1. *Bos.* I, 247, 307, n. 2. 2. *Ibid.* II, 118. 3. *Ibid.* II, 451, n. 3.

closely, and a distinction should be made between the love of a quarrel, which distinguished the scholars of the Renaissance and even of later ages down to his own time, and Johnson's own attitude in face of personal attack. Their habit of employing invective and scurrilous abuse seemed to him unworthy of his position as preacher of Christian morals to his generation. It is true that he entered upon a violent literary quarrel with Macpherson over the authenticity of the Ossianic poems, but he did so with the laudable intention of exposing a fraud upon the literary public, and on the whole he emerged from it with the honors of war. His dogmatic temper and commanding position in the literary world had made him one of the most talked-of men in England, creating for him a host of enemies. During the last twenty years of his life he was attacked from all quarters, but never once did he undertake to reply. His altogether manly attitude in the face of unfriendly criticism is reflected in his comment on Dryden's various literary quarrels. Attacks rarely hurt an author, he was once heard to remark, for "attack is the reaction; I never think I have hit hard, unless it rebounds." He would rather be attacked than be unnoticed, he declared again, "for the worst thing you can do to an author is to be silent as to his works."[1]

As Johnson is the last in the line of scholar-dictators, so also was he the last to retain the superstition of Latin as a spoken language. The familiar story of the round-robin sent to the old dictator on the occasion of the composition of an

1. *Bos.* II, 335; III, 375.

Johnson's formula for writing notes, though directed especially at contemporary editors of Shakespeare, yet throws a ray of light on his opinion of literary quarrels in general: "The work is performed, first by railing at the stupidity, negligence, ignorance, and asinine carelessness of the former editors, and showing, from all that goes before and all that follows, the inelegance and absurdity of the old reading; then by proposing something, which to superficial readers would seem specious, but which the author rejects with indignation; then by producing the true reading, with a long paraphrase, and concluding with loud acclamations on the discovery, and a sober wish for the advancement and prosperity of true criticism." *Works*, V, 149.

epitaph in memory of Goldsmith to be placed in Westminster Abbey, and his retort, "I wonder that Joe Warton, a scholar by profession, should be such a fool," [1] illustrates his clinging to the traditional worship of Latin scholarship. Like most English schoolboys, he early began to "lisp in numbers," having made youthful translations of Virgil and Horace before he had reached his nineteenth year.[2] During the two years he spent at home before entering Oxford he covered a large amount of reading in a desultory way; in his own words: "not voyages and travels, but all literature, Sir, all ancient writers, all *manly:* though but little Greek, only some of Anacreon and Hesiod"; and so when he came up to the University the Master of Pembroke pronounced him the best qualified to enter that he had ever known come there.[3] At his first appearance at the University he astonished his hearers by unexpectedly quoting Macrobius, an author always a favorite of his.[4] During his residence there he read Greek solidly, and performed the feat of translating Pope's *Messiah* into Latin so well that it brought forth the poet's own commendation.[5] Throughout his life he was a constant student of the classical languages, particularly of Latin, of which he possessed a knowledge intimate and profound. He was fond of composing in these languages, sometimes turning Greek epigrams into Latin,[6] and he was always ready to compose Latin epitaphs on memorial occasions. Latin was to him a living thing, and he acquired a conversational fluency in it which astonished all who heard him speak in that tongue. De Quincey, admitting that Johnson did not understand Latin "with the elaborate and circumstantial accuracy required for the editing critically of a Latin classic," describes his Latin attainments as follows:

1. *Bos.* III, 84, n. 2.
2. *Ibid.* I, 51–53.
3. *Ibid.* I, 57.
4. *Ibid.* I, 59.
5. *Ibid.* I, 61, n. 2: "The writer of this poem will leave it a question for posterity, whether his or mine be the original."
6. *Ibid.* IV, 384.

"But if he had less than that, he had also more: he *possessed* that language in a way that no extent of mere critical knowledge could confer. He wrote it genially, not as one translating into it painfully from English, but as one using it as his original organ of thinking. And in Latin verse he expressed himself at times with the energy and freedom of a Roman." [1]

Johnson then takes his place alongside of the great modern masters of the Latin tongue. He harks back to the time when Latin was the universal means of communication between the controversialists of all nations; when other languages were thought to be too perishable for permanent records, and Latin had by the process of time proved itself to be the only effective means of preserving ideas. He was never pedant enough to look upon his own tongue as doomed, but he did consider classical learning as the only foundation of a sound culture. In this respect he stood with the older tradition.

His classical library, as the sale catalogue reveals, was a remarkably complete scholar's collection, including editions by most of the commentators both in England and on the continent of Europe. A fair proportion are editions of the sixteenth century, including an Aldus Aeschines, 1513 (no. 98), an Aldus Apollonius, 1521 (no. 511), Pindar, 1516 (no. 443), Macrobius, Cologne, 1521 (no. 191), Euripides, Basel, 1530 (no. 509), and Virgil, 1534 (no. 447). Numerous other Renaissance editions of the classics appear. This stamps Johnson as something of a collector, a part of whose pension must have found its way into the second-hand bookshops with which certain London streets were doubtless lined then as now. Certainly it makes clear that he was not only deeply versed in the classics themselves but knew the results of the best scholarship upon them.[2]

1. Quoted *Bos.* I, 272, n. 3.

2. See *Ibid.* IV, 279, for his opinion of a scholar's library: "He said he thought it unnecessary to collect many editions of a book, which were all the same, except

His peculiar fondness for modern Latin poetry distinguishes him from Boileau, who incurred Johnson's censure for "an injudicious and peevish contempt" for modern Latin experiments. As early as 1734 he issued *Proposals* for an edition of the Latin works of Politian, together with a history of modern Latin poetry from Petrarch to Politian.[1] Petrarch he discovered one day in an old folio (probably his Latin works) when on a search for some apples behind his father's bookshelves. Twice in the *Lives of the Poets* he refers to a poem, *Hymnus ad Umbram*, by Woverius, quoting some lines from it, and once to an epigram, *De Sacerdote Furem consolante*, by Georgius Sabinus, "a poet now little known or read, though once the friend of Luther and Melancthon."[2] The poem *Nihil* by Jean Passerat is quoted in full at the end of the *Life of Rochester*, by way of comparison with the Englishman's poem on *Nothing*. His criticism of Milton's, Cowley's, and Addison's Latin verses and his comment on the work of Thomas May, 1595–1650, whether acceptable or not to modern critics of Latin poetry, are the result of long acquaintance with similar attempts to imitate the classics.[3]

as to the paper and print; he would have the original, and all the translations, and all the editions which had any variations in the text."

1. *Bos.* I, 90. "Angeli Politiani Poemata Latina, quibus, Notas cum historia Latinae poeseos, a Petrarchae aevo ad Politiani tempora deducta, et vita Politiani fusius quam antehac enarrata, addidit Sam. Johnson."

2. *Lives* I, 225; II, 302. *Jo n. Wouweri, Dies Aestiva sive De Umbra Paegnion*, 1610. *Ibid.* II, 208. *Georgii Sabinii, Poemata*, 1558.

3. *Ibid.* I, 161. "[Milton's] Latin pieces are lusciously elegant; but the delight which they afford is rather by the exquisite imitation of the ancient writers, by the purity of the diction, and the harmony of the numbers, than by any power of invention or vigour of sentiment." He preferred the elegies to the rest.

Ibid. II, 82–83. Addison's verses are entitled to particular praise because "he has not confined himself to the imitation of any ancient author, but has formed his style from the general language, such as a diligent perusal of the productions of different ages happened to supply. . . . By the sonorous magnificence of Roman syllables the writer conceals penury of thought and want of novelty, often from the reader, and often from himself."

Ibid. I, 13. *Supplementum Lucani*, 1640. "If the Latin performances of Cowley and Milton be compared, for May I hold to be superior to both, the ad-

His admiration for the work of George Buchanan, the Scotch writer of Latin verses, he often expressed in conversation. Buchanan, he said, was the only man of genius his country ever produced, and a very fine poet. "He has fewer *centos* than any modern Latin poet. He not only had great knowledge of the Latin language, but was a great poetical genius. Both the Scaligers praise him." He once repeated the ode *Calendae Maiae* (the eleventh in the *Miscellaneorum Liber*) and called it one of the happiest of Buchanan's productions. He also declared "that Buchanan had spread the spirit of learning amongst us [the Scotch], but we had lost it during the civil wars." [1]

That Johnson should have preferred these academic experiments in a language which had long ceased to be an effective literary medium reveals a good deal as to his adaptability as a critic of contemporary literature and a good deal as to the direction in which his literary sympathies lay. His failure to distinguish between the really vital and the factitious, and his neglect of the saving grace of common sense in these instances, betray a mental ponderosity and an uncertainty of taste which sometimes led him astray when he came to deal with matters beyond his ken.

But Johnson's Latin experiments have a significance much greater than they can have as mere examples of academic exercises. They reveal his mind steeped in Latin scholarship and consequently in possession of standards and models that only a long classical tradition could have given him. It must not be forgotten that Johnson is perhaps the last of the long line of Latin scholars whose familiarity with the language had colored their view of literature and of literary study.

vantage seems to lie on the side of Cowley. Milton is generally content to express the thoughts of the ancients in their language; Cowley, without much loss of purity or elegance, accommodates the diction of Rome to his own conceptions."

1. *Bos.* IV, 185; I, 460; II, 96; V, 398; V, 57.

For better or for worse, Johnson's literary judgments grew out of the toil which their author spent in acquiring his remarkable mastery over the Latin language and Latin literature.

Greek he did not "possess" in quite the same degree as Latin, but his friends looked upon him as no mean Greek scholar. At the age of sixty-seven he resolved to apply himself vigorously to the Greek and Italian tongues.[1] He admitted that he was not a good Greek scholar, though one of his friends, Jacob Bryant by name, also declared that it was not easy to say what such a man as Johnson would call a good Greek scholar; and Dr. Burney, one of his circle of intimates, acknowledged that Johnson could give a Greek word for nearly every English one.[2] He was so omnivorous in his reading, reading furiously and seldom getting to the end of a book, that it is not surprising to find Adam Smith declaring that Johnson knew more books than any man alive.[3] At some time or other during his life he must have read nearly all the available Greek literature, and he must have retained in his memory a very large portion of what he read. He owned that many knew more Greek than he, but that his grammar would show he had once taken pains.[4] At one time while on a visit to Eton he astonished them all with the display of his critical, classical, and prosodical treasures, and also himself, for he protested he did not know he was so rich.[5]

Toward which of the Greek writers he was most inclined can be ascertained fairly well from Boswell's accounts of his reading and from various expressions scattered through his pages. Homer he knew intimately and appreciated heartily, as befitted his classical training and scholarship. Just as his admiration for Shakespeare was based on the poet's just representations of general nature, so he found Homer's chief

1. *Bos.* III, 90. 2. *Ibid.* V, 458, n. 5; IV, 385. 3. *Ibid.* I, 71.
4. *Misc.* II, 363. 5. *Ibid.* II, 364.

merit in appropriating to particular persons qualities common to all mankind. His special preference was for the *Odyssey*, which he ranked above the *Aeneid* in point of plot, and praised for its domestic scenes.[1] Hesiod he read at the university; the lyric poets — Pindar, Anacreon, and Theocritus — he also knew.[2] During his sleepless nights he amused himself by translating into Latin from the Greek many of the epigrams of the *Anthologia*.[3] Both Xenophon[4] and Thucydides he had read with care, contrasting *Hudibras*, in his *Life of Butler*, unfavorably with the latter for its paucity of events, there being more said than done; "the scenes are too seldom changed, and the attention is tired with long conversation."[5] With the Greek dramatists he confessed himself not intimately acquainted, though this is hardly true of Euripides, whom he read early and returned to later in life. Editions of all of them are to be found in the sale catalogue of his library. Demosthenes, Aeschines, and Isocrates had their place on his shelves, as did Plutarch, for whom as a great biographer he felt a natural inclination.[6] Though the philosophy of Plato could hardly have had any very great influence upon his intellectual life, he is mentioned twice in the *Rambler* (92, 193). Socrates, who we might think would have an especial appeal to the great English moralist, is frequently mentioned in Boswell and the three periodicals. He was the man who reduced philosophy to common life and whom therefore both Addison and Johnson consciously followed in their moral reflections. Aristotle, it need hardly be said, he had absorbed as the founder of classical criticism, and he even projected translations of the *Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*. Of Greek literature after

1. *Bos.* III, 193; IV, 218.

2. *Ibid.* IV, 2; II, 202. *Misc.* I, 176.

3. *Bos.* IV, 384. 4. *Ibid.* III, 94; IV, 32; V, 414. 5. *Lives*, I, 211.

6. *Nos.* 341, 643, 163, 153, 98, 6, in the Sale Catalogue of his library (see Appendix). See *Bos.* IV, 382, for his projected work after the manner of Plutarch.

the classical period, Boswell notes only Callimachus and Apollonius Rhodius.

His acquaintance with Latin literature was so truly vast that a summary of it seems almost superfluous; only certain of his preferences need mention. Not only classical Latin but also the whole history of Latin writing was at his entire command, and he was upon the whole a competent critic of Latin composition. With Latin poetry in particular he was most intimately acquainted, and nearly all the Latin poets appear often in Boswell and the *Lives of the Poets*. Virgil, the object of worship by the critics of three centuries, was almost his daily companion. At the age of seventy-four he read Virgil through, taking a book of the *Aeneid* each night for twelve nights and finding great delight in it.[1] The *Georgics* he did not like, but the *Eclogues* he had almost by heart. His review of the *Eclogues* in *Adventurer* 92, in which he prefers them to Theocritus, though somewhat cold, expresses a preference in keeping with his general love for the Roman poet. The Greek poet, though living in a beautiful country, did not abound in description, and painted manners coarse and gross. Virgil has more of description, more of manners, more of art. Here speaks the neo-classic critic submitting to the dictation of the law of imitation, which in the early days of his writing he was not sure enough of himself to defy. Indeed, nearly all of these criticisms of the days of the periodicals reveal a mental stiffness and want of freedom in expressing his views that do not help to raise him above the level of the general crowd of little critics who were the truest representatives of neo-classicism. Johnson's treatment of Milton, and in this instance, of Virgil, has gained for him with most men the reputation of being the narrowest member of a narrow school of criticism. So also in his paper on the pastorals (*Rambler* 121) he severely, and not very acutely, criticizes some of the defects

1. *Bos.* IV, 218.

of the *Aeneid*, in his endeavor to prove how ineffective pastoral imitation had become. But Virgil was no doubt more to him than the master and the model for neo-classical poets, and it seems just to say that Johnson understood and appreciated the Roman poet as one of the greatest poets in the world and as a vast influence upon the culture of Europe.

In any summary of Johnson's preferences among the Latin poets, Juvenal deserves more than passing mention. The two imitations of the Roman satirist through which he first attained recognition in the literary world established his position as the chief censor of manners and morals of his time. Some discussion of his relations to the spirit of his literary ancestor, even if it may seem to involve a digression from our subject, ought surely to aid us to a comprehension of his powerful and somewhat rigid nature and so of his approach to questions of life and letters. For Johnson was ever the moralist in his judgments of all things human, and it is most essential that we should enter into sympathetic understanding of him if we in turn may hope to judge him fairly and well.

In 1738, the year of the appearance of *London*, the author, unknown and under the immediate pressure of want, did not view life in too cheerful a mood, and turned for his own model of verse composition to the great Roman satirist whose denunciations of wickedness in the capital of the ancient world afforded a congenial theme for such a born moralist as he. A brief characterization of Juvenal's satires, particularly the *Third* and the *Tenth*, which Johnson chose for imitation, and a comparison of them with their eighteenth-century followers, will show how far Johnson was capable of retaining the spirit of the original.

It will be noted that Johnson has imitated one from each of the two groups of Juvenal's satires, choosing perhaps the most striking of all the author's work. The *Third Satire*,

falling into the earlier group, displays the author's peculiar gift of vivid portrayal of Roman life. This indictment of the life of the capital presents a powerful and immensely vital picture of the social life and the physical features of the Rome he knew. Lacking something of the appalling arraignment of moral degradation which some of the other satires reveal, notably the *Second*, *Sixth*, and *Ninth*, it yet depicts with startling concreteness of effect and vividness of detail the various corruptions of a great empire in its decay. Everything is laid bare, to the last disgusting detail. And accompanying the picture is that moral invective, the *saeva indignatio*, which the author pours out on the degeneracy of the great city. How far these glaring and shocking details are the result of a certain vigor of declamation which led him to excesses of language, it is not our purpose to determine. He has chosen to hide himself behind his work, denying us the privilege of knowing the reasons for the violence of his invective.

The *Tenth Satire*, standing at the head of the later group, is more general in tone than any in the first group, citing not only Roman but Greek and Carthaginian examples of the failure of human ambitions, and concludes with a very noble expression of Stoical morality, which counsels the reader to place his hopes elsewhere than on human happiness, and points out for what it is permitted mankind to pray.[1] The whole of the second group of satires seems in fact to represent a calmer and more philosophical view of life; the author's

1. Nil ergo optabunt homines? si consilium vis,
Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris. — Lines 346–348.

Orandum est, ut sit mens sana in corpore sano. — 356.

Monstro, quod ipse tibi possis dare; semita certe
Tranquillae per virtutem patet unica vitae.
Nullum numen abest, si sit prudentia; sed te
Nos facimus, Fortuna, deam, caeloque locamus. — 363–366.

passion has cooled, and he dwells rather on the praise of virtue than on the unadorned depiction of the ignoble details of vice. Beyond these last noble sentiments of the aged satirist pagan morality did not perhaps advance.

London, Johnson's imitation of the *Third Satire*, follows its original closely in detail, but with one important exception. The imitator, following out the bent of his mind, has chosen the particularly sententious or reflective lines of his model for imitation, making his own elaborations and applications of them. By this means he has kept the saving grace of generality, a fundamental principle of the neo-classical creed. In addition, if in Thales, the fictitious character in the poem, we are to see the poet Savage, the friend of his days of want, we can realize how this poem must have been the fruit of great mental and physical suffering presented in the literary form most acceptable to his contemporaries. At the very outset we perceive a difference in the two authors. Opposed to Juvenal's impersonality, if impersonality it was, we find in Johnson a strong personal bias toward the satiric mood. The author still bore a vivid recollection of his terrible struggle to rise above his condition and of the many humiliations he had endured from those more fortunate than he.

The English poem, after the manner of its original, opens with the departure of Thales for the country, where he hoped by escaping the vice and misery of London, to breathe in distant fields a purer air. This turning to a country life as a refuge from vice and poverty clearly proves that the poem was largely a literary exercise, after the approved manner of current imitations, but reflecting a good deal of the author's characteristic attitude toward society. Johnson never could have brought himself to write otherwise than for rhetorical effect upon the charms of country life. Perhaps he still had the opening lines of this friend's *The Wanderer* in mind:

She flies all public care, all venal strife,
To try the still, compar'd with active life;
To prove, by these, the sons of men may owe
The fruits of bliss to bursting clouds of woe;
That e'en calamity, by thought refin'd,
Inspirits and adorns the thinking mind.

The great difference between the two poems is the difference of concreteness of expression and vividness of detail. Johnson has no desire to make himself the scourge of decadent London, nor does he disgust the reader with nauseous details. His prevailing mood is the old one inspired by a strong feeling of the futility of human endeavor; it is rather a lament for the follies and weaknesses of human nature than a savage invective against the English metropolis. While ostensibly directing his satire against London, his real objective seems to have been human nature as he had come to know it in his days of poverty. Hence the comparative lack of concrete detail and the tone rather of sorrow than of anger prevailing in the poem. The most concrete lines in the poem — those substituting the influence of French manners and French life upon the English for Juvenal's juster and more powerful description of the corrupting effect of Greek men and manners upon Roman life — gave him his opportunity for expressing his inveterate prejudice against the French, a prejudice of which he never rid himself.

Moreover, the hard circumstances of Johnson's life in London, during which his rugged nature received scars which never entirely healed, make the fine lines (166–169) upon the effects of poverty far more pathetic than anything we can find in Juvenal. The reader is aware that these sentiments have been wrung from the depths of personal experience. The following eloquent lines have the ring of bitter experience:

Of all the griefs that harass the distress'd,
Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest;
Fate never wounds more deep the gen'rous heart,
Than when a blockhead's insult points the dart.

That other line, so often quoted, "Slow rises worth by poverty depress'd," is the more affecting as we know against what the author had to struggle.[1]

When we turn to the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, imitated from the *Tenth Satire* and published eleven years later than *London*, we find a poem broader in scope and, like its original, marked by a more philosophical spirit than the other. By this time the author had ceased to look upon the world through distorted spectacles and had arrived at a ripe maturity of thought and feeling. Following his model, Johnson has maintained rather a tone of moral and philosophical reflection than of satiric denunciation, as may be judged from the following lines:

> Yet e'en on this her load misfortune flings,
> To press the weary minutes' flagging wings;
> New sorrow rises as the day returns,
> A sister sickens, or a daughter mourns.
> Now kindred merit fills the sable bier,
> Now lacerated friendship claims a tear;
> Year chases year, decay pursues decay,
> Still drops some joy from with'ring life away;
> New forms arise, and diff'rent views engage,
> Superfluous lags the vet'ran on the stage,
> Till pitying nature signs the last release,
> And bids afflicted worth retire to peace.

Again we have the saving virtue of generality, and where he does choose examples of the folly of ambition and the vanity of human wishes, he employs them as general types of the failure of earthly hopes. Avoiding repulsive images and generally smoothing out the violence of the original, he has followed its main design. For Sejanus he has chosen Wolsey;

1. Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se,
Quam quod ridiculos homines facit.

Haud facile emergunt, quorum virtutibus obstat.
Res angusta domi; sed Romae durior illis
Conatus.

for Cicero and Demosthenes we have Lydiat, Galileo, and Laud; and in place of Hannibal he has substituted the glowing picture of Swedish Charles. The Englishman's predilection for moral reflection leads him at every opportunity to draw the moral for the reader more insistently than his literary ancestor cared to do. Charles XII has left his name "to point a moral or adorn a tale," and the whole purpose of the poem soon becomes apparent as a warning that here upon earth we cannot expect a very large share of happiness. Many lines of the poem could be cited as differing in spirit from the more powerful if less poignant original, though it must be admitted that this *Tenth Satire* is by far the calmest and sanest of Juvenal's work. Lack of concreteness, then, and a somewhat more general application of examples are the main differences between the English poem and its model.

As the two poems to a certain degree differ in general tone, they conclude in a different way. Allusion has already been made to Juvenal's stoical eloquence. Johnson too offers his characteristic solution of the problem. As in the final chapter of *Rasselas*, and in numberless *Ramblers* and *Idlers*, he bids us control our passions and resign ourselves to Heaven's will. So speaks the moralist who has made himself the heir of centuries of Christian teaching. Juvenal's spirit as it descended upon Johnson was softened and made endurable in a mind accustomed to find an explanation and reconciliation of man's lot in the loftier purposes of the Divine Will. Had Johnson lived in the days of decadent Rome, he might have been in full sympathy with the indignation of the Roman poet; certainly there was much of the stoic in his own nature. His own words define his sense of Juvenal's greatness: "The peculiarity of Juvenal is a mixture of gaiety and stateliness, of pointed sentences, and declamatory grandeur." [1] The stateliness, the pointed sentences, and the declamation are not

1. *Lives*, I, 447.

lacking in the imitator, but the unrelieved denunciation and the personal aloofness of the elder satirist are not to be found in Johnson.

For Juvenal's essential qualities we must turn to more thoroughgoing scourges of their generation, like Hogarth and Swift, the latter of whom incurred Johnson's censure for his hatred of mankind and his bitterness of spirit. He saw clearly enough, it is true, the vices and selfishness and misery of his time, but he was very far from wishing to set himself apart from them. Possessing an humble spirit, he knew only too well his own failings, and felt that he himself was a fellow-sinner and a fellow-sufferer, and his heart conceived too strong a sympathy for others to permit him to be long indignant at their follies or their weakness. This sense of sharing in human struggle, which offers such scanty rewards of happiness, pervades the moral reflections of the *Rambler* and the *Idler*, and lacks the animosity and the bitterness of the truest satire. Johnson's humanity preserved him from the vehement indignation of Juvenal.

Johnson's appreciation of Horace and his capacity for comprehending the poet's point of view were doubtless vastly influenced by the conscious adoption, in the literature of the first half of the eighteenth century, of the philosophy and the sentiments of the pagan poet, and by the introduction into current poetry, after the approved neo-classical manner, of Horatian ideas and phrases. But that he loved Horace independently of any conventional admiration for him may be gathered from an item in Boswell's note-book, 20 Sept. 1777: "That Horace's Odes have been the composition in which he has taken greatest delight." Whether or not a man of Johnson's somewhat blunt sensibilities could have fully perceived the poet's exquisite urbanity and genial paganism, he most surely felt the fine good sense and unfailing good taste and the rich vein of grave quiet humor which pervade his verse. Johnson's criti-

cism of Pope, that he was not Horatian because his satires were too personal and too bitter, with nothing to praise, constitutes, I think, a just reflection on the chief of the neo-classic poets, and by implication on the spirit of the whole group of self-styled "Augustans." Pope, that is to say, was rather an epigrammatist and rhetorician than a satirist of the style of Horace. The motto placed on the title page of the *Rambler* might imply a Horatian mood, which Johnson did not always follow:

> Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri,
> Quo me cunque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes.[1]

But after all, it is as the man who, by a sane and wholesome examination of his own nature, held the mirror up to universal human nature that Horace appealed to Johnson. It is the turning of a strong, sombre nature, whose prevailing mood was one of profound seriousness, to the poet of broad experience, who could give relief to natures of different quality through his good sense, his good breeding, and his abiding philosophy of life. The self-discipline and self-criticism taught by the Roman poet and a certain melancholy which lay beneath his placid gaiety must have appealed to Johnson's nature even more than the exquisite lightness of the Odes. He once declared, for example, that he did not believe Horace was a cheerful man simply because he said he was,[2] and that Horace in confessing his neglect of religion was not in earnest in saying, "Parcus deorum cultor et infrequens."[3] Another quotation illustrates the inherent melancholy of Johnson's rugged nature: "In culpa est animus, qui se non effugit unquam."[4] One day when driving with Boswell in a post-chaise he repeated many of the odes, particularly the one beginning, "Eheu fugaces."[5]

1. *Epistles*, I, i, 14.
2. *Bos.* III, 251.
3. *Ibid.* IV, 215.
4. *Ibid.* III, 417; *Epistles*, I, xiv, 13.
5. *Bos.* III, 193; *Odes*, II, 14.

When a post-chaise is mentioned in connection with Johnson we at once think of the remark of the sage that the thing he preferred doing above any other was driving with a pretty woman in a post-chaise—surely as Horatian a sentiment as any other.

Another ode which he was fond of reciting was the one entitled *Otium divos rogat in patenti*.[1] This is like the observation he once made that Horace boasted too much when he said that, if Jove would grant life and wealth, he would provide an equanimity of temper, "aequum mi animum ipse parabo."[2] A characteristic resolution of Johnson's seems to echo Horace: in his *Prayers and Meditations* for October, 1729, he writes, "Desidiae valedixi; syrenis istius cantibus surdam posthac aurem obversurus." Horace's line is as follows: "Vitanda est improba Siren Desidia."[3]

In these brief comparisons we have the picture of the Christian moralist, none too happy in his life, seeking consolation in the manly wisdom of the pagan poet. Our sense of the real sanity and nobleness of each is enhanced by such a situation. Horace's clear-eyed outlook on life and his broad tolerance of human frailty, combined with serene self-knowledge and fine good sense, reached the heart of Johnson, whose own nature doubtless needed just such a stimulus.

Except for some of the patristic writing of the Middle Ages, and three or four metrical romances, our knowledge of Johnson's reading takes a long leap from the literature of the Roman Empire to the revival of classical learning in the Renaissance. His acquaintance with this period of literature must have been fairly thorough, for Boswell records as one of his projected works a *History of the Revival of Learning in Europe, containing an account of whatever contributed to the restoration of literature; such as controversies, printing, the*

1. *Bos.* V, 163; *Odes*, II, 16. 2. *Bos.* V, 381; *Epistles*, I, XVIII, 112.
3. *Misc.* I, 5; *Satires*, II, III, 14.

destruction of the Greek empire, the encouragement of great men, with the lives of the most eminent patrons and most eminent early professors of all kinds of learning in different countries.[1] This portentous work, if constructed, would doubtless have proved an exhaustive treatment of the age of scholarship, and the plan seems to indicate, what we might safely assume, a competent acquaintance with the subject on the part of the author. Yet, except for the bare mention of Christopher Pitt's translation of Vida [2] and a few direct but incidental references to the *Poetics* of Julius Caesar Scaliger, his works contain no mention of the numerous commentaries upon Aristotle and the various "Poeticæ" which appeared in the middle years of the sixteenth century.[3] He no doubt was more or less familiar with the founders of neo-classic criticism in Italy and France, and his failure to mention them specifically in his writings would tend to show that whatever of neo-classicism appears in his own criticism found its source in the great body of critical effort which followed the earlier Italian work.

On the other hand, the sale catalogue of his library clearly proves that Johnson possessed an exceedingly strong interest in Renaissance textual criticism. Indeed, these militant scholars who habitually and joyously entered the lists in defense of their emendations appealed powerfully to Johnson's biographical sense. Very human were these Humanists; and their burly successor, who at one time carried with him a six-foot cudgel for defense against an attack by the author of

1. *Bos.* IV, 382. 2. *Lives*, III, 278.

3. That he was familiar with the Italian commentators on Aristotle is shown by the sale catalogue of his library; no. 88, *Pole's Synopsis criticorum*, 5 t., 1669; and no. 9, *Thesaurus criticus a Grutero*, 6 t.: *Lampas, sive Fax Artium Liberalium, hoc est, Thesaurus criticus in quo infinitis locis Theologorum, Jurisconsultorum, Medicorum, Philosophorum, Oratorum, Historicorum, Poetarum, Grammaticorum, scripta supplentur, corriguntur, illustrantur, notantur*, Franc. 1602–12. See also no. 294, *Vossi commentaria rhetorica;* no. 427, *Lambinus, de laudibus literarum*, 1564; no. 458, *Vossius de rhetorica arte;* no. 523, *Vossius de arte poetica;* no. 366, *Hieronomi Vidae poemata.*

Ossian, doubtless felt a real affinity for them. The names of the great commentators, Dutch, Italian, and French, appear as editors of many of the classics upon his shelves. A number of these editors had also made themselves conversant with law and medicine, and Johnson's library possessed many authorities on these subjects, Grotius's great work on the law having its place of honor there.[1] The whole history of humanism, with its triumphs and its controversies, like the learned quarrel between Salmasius and Milton (who was in many respects a typical Renaissance scholar), made an instant appeal to Johnson, who, as has just been noted, found great delight in the anecdotal and biographical side of these men. His library contained the great humanists, such as Isaac Casaubon, the two Scaligers, Longolius, Salmasius, and Erasmus.

The last of these men he knew both directly and through the letters of Baudius, noted in the entries of his diary of a journey into North Wales in 1774.[2] In the *Life of Milton* he quotes from Baudius: "but what Baudius says of Erasmus seems applicable to him [Milton]: 'magis habuit quod fugeret, quam quod sequerentur.'" Among his observations for August 7, 1774, he records, "Battologiam ab iteratione, recte distinguit Erasmus. — *Mod. Orandi Deum*, p. 56–144."[3] In reading *Ciceronianus* he notes, "My affection and understanding went along with Erasmus, except that once or twice he somewhat unskilfully entangles Cicero's civil or moral, with his rhetorical, character."[4] Two other references to the works of Erasmus mention *Militis Christiani Enchiridion* and *Erasmus to the Nuns*, "full of mystick notions and alle-

1. An amusing instance of Johnson's respect for authority occurred when, suffering from a fever, he wrote: "I believe it was not an intermittent, for I took of my own head physick yesterday; and Celsus says, it seems, that if a cathartick be taken the fit will return *certo certius*. I would bear something rather than Celsus should be detected in an error." *Letters* I, 220.

2. *Bos.* V, 444. "Baudius on Erasmus (*Baudi Epistolae*)."

3. *Ibid.* V, 444.

4. *Ibid.* IV, 353.

gories."[1] Under 15 July of his diary of a journey into North Wales the following passage appears:

> τὸ πρῶτον Μῶρος, τὸ δὲ δεύτερον εἶλεν Ἐρασμὸς,
> τὸ τρίτον ἐκ Μουσῶν στέμμα Μίκυλλος ἔχει.[2]

This was evidently copied from a manuscript at Ashburn, where he was lodging, as Duppa, the first editor of the *Journal*, notes that Johnson has introduced ἦρεν by the side of εἶλεν in the manuscript.

The Doctor had a strong liking for the two Scaligers, partly on account of the rich biographical material which came to his hand, and partly, perhaps, because he felt that he himself bore some fancied resemblance to them. Of Edmund Smith he says, "He was a man of such estimation among his companions that the casual censures or praises which he dropped in conversation were considered, like those of Scaliger, as worthy of preservation."[3] Might he not have thought with pardonable pride, when writing this, of the faithful "Scotch burr" who was to immortalize him? His respect for the learning of both father and son was very great, and he twice took the opportunity to remark, "Malim cum Scaligero errare quam cum Clavio recte sapere."[4] In 1731 a *Miscellany* of undergraduate poems appeared at Oxford, containing Johnson's *Messiah* and a motto from J. C. Scaliger's *Poetics*, "Ex alieno ingenio Poeta, ex suo tantum versificator."[5] Later, in his *Prayers and Meditations*, he notes, "Finivi lectionem *Conf. Fab. Burdonum*," the full title of which is, *Accurata Burdonum*

1. *Bos.* III, 190, n. 3; V, 446.

2. "From the Muses, Sir Thomas More bore away the first crown, Erasmus the second, and Micyllus has the third." *Bos.* V, 430. The last, named Jacques Moltzer (1503–1558), filled the rôle of Micyllus in *The Dream* of Lucian as it was played at the College of Frankfort.

3. *Lives*, II, 19.

4. *Ibid.* I, 413; *Bos.* II, 508. Clavius by order of Pope Gregory XIII corrected the calendar and was attacked by Joseph Scaliger.

5. *Ibid.* I, 72.

(i.e. Scaligerorum) *Fabulae Confutatio.*[1] Of the great Julius Caesar Scaliger, 1484–1558, he makes but incidental mention, though showing particular acquaintance with the *Poetics*. He notes in the *Life of Sheffield* that "Scaliger in his poems terms Virgil *sine labe monstrum*";[2] and in the *Life of Cowley* he says, "I know not whether Scaliger himself has persuaded many readers to join with him in his preference of the two favourite odes [of Horace], which he estimates in his raptures at the value of a kingdom."[3] Mantuan's *Bucolicks* was dignified by Baudius with a comment and was received into the schools and studied as a classic in spite of the complaint of the older Scaliger. A final further reference to Scaliger occurs in the *Preface* to Shakespeare where he expresses doubt of his own emendations: "Yet Scaliger could confess to Salmasius how little satisfaction his emendations gave him: 'Illudunt nobis conjecturae nostrae, quarum nos pudet, posteaquam in meliores codices incidimus.' And Lipsius could complain that criticks were making faults, by trying to remove them: 'Ut olim vitiis, ita nunc remediis laboratur.' And, indeed, where mere conjecture is to be used, the emendations of Scaliger and Lipsius, notwithstanding their wonderful sagacity and erudition, are often vague and disputable, like mine or Theobald's."[4]

Through the Scaligers then, Johnson may easily have made himself the heir of the whole learning of the Renaissance, critical and textual, and we need not proceed further than these two great figures to comprehend how completely our author had absorbed the spirit of that time.

A number of other Renaissance critics and scholars are mentioned in the *Lives of the Poets* and elsewhere in Johnson's works. The *Rhetorick* of Vossius (1577–1649), the learned

1. *Misc.* I, 69. The reply of Joseph Scaliger, near the end of his life, to the scurrilous attack of Scioppius on the claim of the Scaligers to be descended from the house of La Scala.

2. *Lives*, II, 176, n. 4. Virgil is addressed as "O monstrum vitio carens."

3. *Ibid.* I, 35.

4. *Works*, V, 151.

Dutch critic, is recommended with Quintilian as an advanced textbook in Johnson's Preface to Dodsley's *Preceptor*, 1740. He gives credit to the Estiennes for the revival of literature in France,[1] referring to Robert Estienne (1503–1559) and his son Henri (1528–1598), whose Greek and Latin lexicons and editions of Plato, Euripides, and Sophocles, printed on their own press, laid the foundations of French scholarship.[2] He left by will, to Mr. Windham, *Poetae Graeci Heroici* per Henricum Stephanum.[3] Ramus (1515–1572) is mentioned as being the first to disturb the quiet of the schools through his opposition to the ancient scholastic philosophy;[4] one of the hundred tales of Poggio, the indefatigable discoverer of classical manuscripts,[5] is pointed to as the source of Gay's *Apparition;* and Erythraeus[6] is credited with having invented the term alliteration. In this connection Johnson's reference to Bentley in the *Preface* to Shakespeare should not be forgotten: "nor is it my intention to depreciate a study [conjectural criticism], that has exercised so many mighty minds, from the revival of learning to our own age, from the Bishop of Aleria[7] to English Bentley."[8]

Johnson must have had considerable familiarity with the French and Italian languages, for Boswell informs us that, though he did not know at what time or by what means he had acquired a competent knowledge of these tongues, he was so well skilled in them as to be qualified as a translator. In Italian literature he seems to have been well equipped as far

1. *Bos.* III, 254.

2. Robertus: *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, Dictionnaire français.* Henricus: *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (long the source of all Greek lexicons).

3. *Bos.* IV, 402, n. 2. Published 1560. In *Ibid.* IV, 3, Johnson calls Mattaire's *Stephanorum Historia,* 1709, a heavy book.

4. *Lives,* I, 148.

5. Recovered Quintilian, Lucretius, 7 orations of Cicero, 12 plays of Plautus.

6. Venetian Latinist, born at Venice, lived in 1559. *Lives,* I, 295.

7. John Andreas, d. 1493. Secretary of the Vatican Library, published Herodotus, Strabo, Livy, Aulus Gellius.

8. *Works,* V, 151.

back as the time of Petrarch. Dante he mentions only once and then to call attention to the striking similarity between the opening lines of *Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Divine Comedy*, an observation which any neo-classical critic might safely have made. Dante was not to become fashionable for another two generations. He had, however, a genuine love for Petrarch, dating from his boyhood days when he first became interested in the revival of learning in Italy. His consistent attacks upon modern conventional imitations brought forth some not unfavorable comment on Petrarch's employment of certain literary devices, as when he asserts that the "obligation to amorous ditties" was the means, through the Italian poet's tuneful homage to his Laura, of refining the manners of the lettered world, but that his imitators had made of it a lifeless convention. Waller's regret for his early poetry, Johnson remarks in another passage, may be compared to the sentiments of his great predecessor Petrarch, which he "bequeathed to posterity upon his review of that love and poetry which have given him immortality." In pursuit of his old enemy, pastoral imitation, he tells how Petrarch revived the ancient practice of writing eclogues and entertained the learned men of the age with the novelty of modern pastorals in Latin.[1]

Ariosto and Tasso, the two epic poets who became the subject of controversy for successive generations of critics, were naturally known to Johnson. In summarizing the claims of Dryden to greatness he grants him the surpassing quality of attraction and delight. "By his proportion of this predomination I will consent that Dryden should be tried: of this, which, in opposition to reason, makes Ariosto the darling and the pride of Italy; of this, which, in defiance of criticism, continues Shakespeare the sovereign of the drama."[2] Tasso is frequently mentioned, though not often by any specific

1. *Lives*, III, 317. 2. *Ibid.* I, 454.

criticism. On his visit to General Paoli, Johnson begged him to repeat one of the introductory stanzas of the first book of *Jerusalem Delivered*, and then found fault with the simile of sweetening the edges of a cup for a child, in that it was transferred from Lucretius into an epic poem.[1]

Of Machiavelli and Boccaccio there is no mention, but the works of both are included in his library.[2] He quotes Dryden as saying that Shakespeare's plots are to be found in the hundred novels of Cinthio. He lays the "metaphysical abuse" at the doors of Marino and his followers, and speaks of Dryden's *Fables* as being the first in English of a mode of writing which the Italians call *rifacimento*, a renovation of ancient writers by modernizing their language. "Thus the old poem of Boiardo has been new-dressed by Domenichi and Berni."[3] In commenting on the authors of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, he commends the book of *Manners* by Casa and the *Courtier* of Castiglione as having accomplished the same reformation of manners in Italy.[4]

Johnson's brief, though comprehensive, history of the pastoral, however, gives the best impression that he must have read widely in Italian literature of the Renaissance and must have comprehended the rise of certain literary conventions which he set himself to oppose. His consistent antagonism to pastoral imitation led him to look with something like contempt upon the followers of Theocritus and Virgil during the revival of learning. He describes the Italian pastoral dialogues and the mythological trappings of this species of poetry, and names Petrarch and "our Spenser" as followers of the fashion. Mantuan's popularity in the schools is mentioned; Sannazaro's *Arcadia* in native prose and verse, and Guarini's *Pastor Fido* and *Favole Boscareccie*, or *Sylvan Dramas*,

1. *Bos.* III, 330. The simile is to be found in *Jerusalem*, canto 1, stanza 3, and in *de Rerum Natura*, I, 935, and *Ibid.* IV, 125.

2. Nos. 549 and 304. 3. *Lives*, I, 454–55. 4. *Ibid.* II, 92, 95.

receive their condemnation: "and all nations of Europe filled volumes with Thyrsis and Damon, and Thestylis and Phyllis."[1] Tasso and Guarini come in for further censure when, describing Gay's lighter pieces, he observes: "*Dione* is a counterpart to *Amynta* and *Pastor Fido*, and other trifles of the same kind, easily imitated, and unworthy of imitation."[2]

Turning to the literature of the French Renaissance, we find a very different situation. Montaigne and Rabelais he had read, but except for them he seems to have been ignorant of the whole period. If this be true, and we have but negative evidence for it, he was, like Boileau, weak in his knowledge of French literary history, and, like him, he failed to perceive that the Pleiade and its members were the real founders of that school of criticism of which he became one of the substantial representatives. Moreover, a decided break in his knowledge of the history of literary criticism must have become evident had he actually undertaken to compile one of his projected works on the subject. The presumption seems to be that if he had been well read in that field, he would frequently have used his information.

He was familiar, however, with French literature after the year 1600. Mrs. Thrale notes that he was a great reader of French literature, and Thomas Tyers makes a similar observation.[3] Though he despised the French in particular and all foreigners in general, claiming that, for all he could see, most of them were fools,[4] he nevertheless applauded the number of French books and the graces of their style.[5] Boswell declares

1. *Lives*, III, 317–19.

2. *Ibid.* II, 284. See *Ibid.* III, 317. "Being not ignorant of Greek, and finding nothing in the word *Eclogue* of rural meaning, he [Petrarch] supposed it to be corrupted by the copiers, and therefore called his own productions *Aeglogues*, by which he meant to express the talk of goatherds, though it meant only the talk of goats."

3. *Misc.* I, 334; II, 363.

4. *Bos.* II, 403; IV, 15; I, 115, n. 1.

5. *Misc.* I, 216.

that he often spoke in praise of French literature, though he claimed that the French writers were superficial, "because they are not scholars, and so proceed upon the mere power of their own minds; and we see how very little power they have."[1] His dislike of Frenchmen induced him to remark, "No, Sir; there are none of the French literati now alive, to visit whom I would cross a sea. I can find in Buffon's book all that he can say."[2] But he once admitted that the French, though not the highest, perhaps, in any department, were yet in every department very high.[3] An extended extract from Boswell will explain his opinion of French literary accomplishments and scholarship. "'There is, perhaps, more knowledge circulated in the French language than in any other.' ... 'But the French (said I) have the art of accommodating literature.' JOHNSON. 'Yes, Sir, we have no such book as Moreri's *Dictionary*.'[4] BOSWELL. 'Their *Ana* are good.' JOHNSON. 'A few of them are good; but we have one book of that kind better than any of them; Seldon's *Table-talk*. As to original literature, the French have a couple of tragick poets who go round the world, Racine and Corneille, and one comick poet, Moliere.' BOSWELL. 'They have Fenelon.' JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, *Telemachus* is pretty well.' BOSWELL. 'And Voltaire, Sir.' JOHNSON. 'He has not stood his trial yet. And what makes Voltaire chiefly circulate is collection; such as his *Universal History*.' BOSWELL. 'What do you say to the Bishop of Meaux?' JOHNSON. 'Sir, nobody reads him.' He would not allow Massilon and Bourdaloue to go round the world. In general, however, he gave the French much praise for their industry."[5]

1. *Bos.* I, 454.

2. *Bos.* V, 229.

3. *Ibid.* II, 125. "Speaking of the French novels, compared with Richardson's, he said, they might be pretty baubles, but a wren was not an eagle."

4. *Le grand dictionnaire historique, ou le mêlange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane*, Lyon, 1674.

5. *Bos.* V, 311.

From this list, which of course was in no sense a complete one, La Fontaine is omitted, as are Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, and La Bruyère;[1] all of whom, however, he held in high esteem. Johnson's knowledge of contemporary French literature must have been nearly as comprehensive as his knowledge of his own.

On another occasion he admitted that the Revival of Letters came into France from Italy before it reached England. He praised the Estiennes for their work in aiding the production of literature, and acknowledged that Caxton had printed only two books which were not translations from the French, — Chaucer and Gower, — and that these two had taken much from the Italians. He concluded by asserting that now the English are before the French in literature.[2]

A few of Johnson's personal sources concerning French literary history deserve mention. In the preface to his *Lives of the Poets* he explains that his purpose had been originally to allot to each poet an advertisement, like those we find in the French Miscellanies, containing a few dates and a general character. We find hints in one of his little memorandum books for an intended Review or Literary Journal as follows: "*The Annals of Literature, foreign as well as domestick.* Imitate Le Clerk — Bayle — Barbeyrac. Infelicity of Journals in England. Works of the learned. We cannot take in all. Sometimes copy from foreign Journalists. Always tell."[3] Jean Le Clerc's *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* was published from 1686 to 1693 in twenty-five volumes, and the *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne* from 1714 to 1726 in twenty-nine volumes. Pierre Bayle published his famous *Dictionnaire historique et critique* from 1696 to 1697, and his *Nouvelles de la république de lettres* 1684–87. Barbeyrac's *Bibliothèque rai-*

1. "He used to condemn me for preferring La Bruyère to the Duc de Rochefoucault, who (he said) was the only *gentleman* writer who wrote like a professed author." *Misc.* I, 334.

2. *Bos.* III, 254.

3. *Lives*, I, xxvi. *Bos.* I, 285.

sonnée des ouvrages des savants de l'Europe was published from 1728 to 1753, and his *Nouvelle Bibliothèque ou Histoire littéraire des principaux écrits*, from 1733 to 1744. Speaking to Dr. Adams concerning the new Review, Johnson says: "My chief purpose is to give my countrymen a view of what is doing in literature upon the continent; and I shall have, in a good measure, the choice of my subject, for I shall select such books as I best understand." [1] Hawkins tells us that Johnson used to recommend *Le Dictionnaire portatif* of the Abbé L'Avocat.[2] In his interview with George III, replying to the King's question regarding the *Journal des Savans*, he described the journal, giving some account of its history and enlarging upon the nature and use of such works.[3]

The general conclusion to be drawn from these citations is that Johnson appreciated the usefulness of such periodicals and dictionaries of literary history in keeping alive a standard of taste and literary feeling in the French reading public, and that in a similar way he wished to compete with the firmly established *Critical Review* and *Monthly Review* by a journal of his own. Certainly his position as the best known literary man in England would have assured him a large circulation, though his dictatorial temper would inevitably have created as great a hostility as the later much-hated *Edinburgh Review*. Johnson and Jeffrey, indeed, have many common characteristics, not the least of them being a never-failing common sense.

Johnson may also have obtained a working knowledge of minor French poetry from some of the many "Recueils," which, like the English selections of "Beauties," — as the *Beauties of Watts*,[4] for which he professed a liking, — were very numerous in the century. Boswell informed him that

1. *Bos.* I, 284.
2. *Misc.* II, 2. Ladvocat, *Dictionnaire portatif des grands hommes.*
3. *Bos.* II, 39.
4. *Misc.* II, 2.

Lord Hailes had sent him three instances of Prior's borrowing from Gombauld in *Recueil des Poetes*, tome 3, and we have Johnson himself stating that he had traced Prior's borrowings in the French Epigrammatists and had been informed that he poached for prey among obscure authors.[1] In this connection it is interesting to note that he had in his library *Delittae Poetarum Gallorum* and a number of other works listed without titles.[2]

With respect to his reading in English literature, we may assert without fear of contradiction that it was exhaustive in those periods in which one might suppose him to be well equipped, that is to say, in the preceding century and a half. He never revealed any genuine acquaintance with the literature before Shakespeare, nor with the drama contemporary with him. With Spenser he was of course acquainted. This unfamiliarity with the lesser details of English literature merely proves that he took little share in the new antiquarianism which was to perform the service of rendering the more obscure portions of our literature available to the public. We have proof that he knew to a certain extent the popular ballads and some of the metrical romances. Beyond this point the defender of the classic faith did not feel it necessary to go.

1. *Lives*, II, 207.

2. No. 522. See also no. 88, *Pole's Synopsis Criticorum*, 5 t., 1669; 562, Bayle's Works, 5 vols., 1774.

CHAPTER III

Doctor Johnson's Relations to Classical and French Critics, except Boileau

JOHNSON'S position at the end of a period of extended critical activity, during which a literary practice had been built up with the writings of former critics as the standard of procedure, makes the task of pointing out his indebtedness to the masters of criticism who wrote before him peculiarly difficult. The immense range of his reading somewhat further complicates the matter, for he must have held the results of previous thinking as a scholarly equipment, without much inclination to acknowledge the authority for his views. If we add to this the fact that he was in the habit of passing his critical decrees somewhat arbitrarily, we have before us a situation full of pitfalls for the unwary. Some discussion, of a general nature, of what he has said of the critics of other times and places should, however, be of service in making clear the starting-points of his own criticism. Incidentally, many of Johnson's critical ideas should in the process come to light.[1]

Of the three great critics of antiquity — Aristotle, Longinus, and Horace — Johnson bore some resemblance to the first and the third. To Aristotle he felt drawn by inclination, by training as a classical scholar, and by his inheritance of the whole neo-classical tradition. If Coleridge's division of all men in their intellectual lives into the ranks of Aristotelians or

1. That he was thoroughly familiar with the history of criticism may be inferred from the title of his projected work: *History of Criticism, as it relates to judging of authours, from Aristotle to the present age. An account of the rise and improvements of that art; of the different opinions of authours, ancient and modern.* Bos. IV, 381.

Platonists has any validity, then the Doctor's strongly logical and reasonable mind can leave no doubt as to his position in this human category.[1] The great Father of Criticism receives occasional direct quotation in the *Lives of the Poets*, with especial fullness in the reproduction of Dryden's exposition of Aristotelian doctrine as part of his reply to Rymer, and of Dennis's denial of the unity of place in his remarks upon Addison's *Cato*. Johnson's own references to Aristotle are mainly incidental and are of no great importance as evidence of influence, but such would not seem to be the case in his adoption of the conventional Aristotelian method of criticism, after the approved eighteenth-century manner. Of the latter the best examples are his two Miltonic critiques, of *Samson Agonistes* in *Rambler* 139 and 140 and of *Paradise Lost* in the *Life of Milton*. Of the metaphysical poets he has this to say: "If the father of criticism has rightly denominated poetry *τέχνη μιμητική, an imitative art*, these writers will without great wrong lose their right to the name of poets, for they cannot be said to have imitated anything; . . . they neither painted the forms of matter nor represented the operations of intellect." [2]

His interpretation of the so-called Katharsis, the purgation of the passions through pity and fear, has evidently followed the turn which Milton received from some of the more important Italian critics, in adopting the medical theory of the effect of tragedy.[3] Replying to a leading question from Boswell one evening, he expressed himself fully: "Why, Sir, you are to consider what is the meaning of purging in the original sense. It is

1. Did he make a vague promise of future writing in the following upon *Rhetoric* and *Poetry* in the preface which he contributed to Dodsley's *Preceptor*: "but a more accurate and philosophical account is expected from a contemporary upon Aristotle's *Art of Poetry*, with which the literature of this nation will be, in a short time, augmented"? *Works*, V, 241.

2. *Lives*, I, 19.

3. See *Preface* to *Samson Agonistes*. Also Spingarn, *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, who quotes from Minturno, *L'Arte Poetica* (Venice 1564) p. 77–80.

to expel impurities from the human body. The mind is subject to the same imperfection. The passions are the great movers of human actions; but they are mixed with such impurities, that it is necessary they should be purged or refined by means of terrour and pity. For instance, ambition is a noble passion; but by seeing upon the stage, that a man who is so excessively ambitious as to raise himself by injustice, is punished, we are terrified at the fatal consequences of such a passion. In the same manner a certain degree of resentment is necessary; but if we see that a man carries it too far, we pity the object of it, and are taught to moderate that passion."[1] This explanation of the phenomenon may seem to us a little long and a little too didactic in its implication, but it is entirely worthy of attention as being one tenable exposition of Aristotle's half-dozen words on the subject. The spectator, who finds relief from the petty cares of his own daily existence in the larger atmosphere of great deeds and heroic action, and is purged thereby of his passions, may draw wholesome lessons of conduct from witnessing a great tragedy, but Johnson goes far in assigning them as the immediate effect of tragic action.

In considering the so-called "poetic justice," he departed from Aristotle's judgment when he made his famous pronouncement in favor of Nahum Tate's version of *King Lear* over the original of Shakespeare. This opinion of his furnishes important evidence concerning his capacity for the conventional sentiment of which his age was so guilty, and will receive proper consideration in another chapter.[2]

1. *Bos.* III, 39.

2. "Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles. . . . A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry, may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life: but since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded, that the observation of justice makes a play worse; or that, if other excellencies are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue.

Longinus does not appear in the sale catalogue of Johnson's library, but was no doubt included among the various unitemized lots lumped together for sale. Twice only does he speak of him in the *Lives of the Poets:* once when he declares that Longinus's praise of Demosthenes fades away before Dryden on Shakespeare;[1] and again when he compares Prior's efforts to be great to the account by Longinus of how Euripides forced himself into grandeur by violence of effort, as the lion kindles his fury by the lashes of his own tail.[2] The following seems an echo of Longinus and of Boileau after him in their famous discussion of God's injunction: "Let there be light, and there was light": — "The miracle of Creation, however it may teem with images, is best described with little diffusion of language: 'He spake the word, and they were made.' "[3]

Precisely what attitude Johnson held towards the writings of the great Platonist it would be difficult to define, since, as in the case of Aristotle, Longinus had by the middle of the century been pretty well incorporated into current criticism, and Johnson had felt his influence through the writings of Boileau in France and of Addison and Dennis in England. Johnson, indubitably Aristotelian in mind and temper, would seem to have had but an inadequate comprehension of the imagination; yet his remarks upon the qualities of the imagination and his definitions of the poetic powers constitute at least a recognition of the true sublime. It is difficult, indeed, to disentangle any eighteenth-century employment of this word from its current misuse in connection with compositions

"In the present case the publick has decided. Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And, if my sensations could add any thing to the general suffrage, I might relate, I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor." *Works*, V, 174.

1. *Lives*, I, 412. 2. *Ibid.* II, 208.

3. *Ibid.* I, 50; Longinus, Section IX; Boileau, *Epistles*, III, 48; *Psalm* CXLVIII, 5.

which might perhaps possess some declamatory vigor, but which were nearly always purely artificial in conception and wooden in execution. That Johnson was liable to fall into this neo-classical error is unquestionably true, though I believe he gradually freed himself from the false taste of his age. I have much to say in the course of this study on the subject of the imagination, for Johnson's understanding of the word is, I think, a crucial test of his flexibility of mind and his capacity to pass beyond the narrow limitations of neo-classicism. Longinus and Johnson may indeed at first thought seem uncongenial company; but a few notes out of the works of the latter, chosen from various periods of his literary life, which appear to be not out of harmony with the utterances of the elder critic, may serve as a point of departure for the consideration of this matter.

Many passages from his great *Preface* to Shakespeare might be cited for this purpose, but his advice to the reader to read the play through before attending to the commentators deserves special mention: "When [your] fancy is once on the wing, let it not stoop at correction or explanation. . . . There is a kind of intellectual remoteness necessary for the comprehension of any great work in its full design and in its true proportions; a close approach shows the smaller niceties, but the beauty of the whole is discerned no longer." [1]

"Wonder," he observes in *Rambler* 137, "is a pause of reason, a sudden cessation of the mental progress which lasts only while the understanding is fixed upon some single idea, and is at an end when it recovers force enough to divide the object into its parts, or mark the intermediate gradations from the first agent to the last consequence." This, like the preceding quotation, enforces the idea that the effect of the sublime upon the reader's mind is a sudden surprise, which deprives him for the moment of his rational and reflective powers and

1. *Works*, V, 152. See also *Lives*, I, 454.

holds him lifted out of his normal self. In another number of the *Rambler*, he concedes as much when he speaks of the exaltation above common life which in tragic and heroic writing reconciles the mind to bold flights and daring figures.

Johnson, while not a genius as the romanticists came to employ the term, was yet aware from his own bitter experience how near to madness a nature of large powers characterized by quick and sudden uprushes of emotion may be allied; and Chapter XLIV of *Rasselas*, concerning the dangerous prevalence of imagination, doubtless contained something of personal confession, for he had many times felt the terror of that condition.[1]

Indeed, his whole life was tinged with a curious waywardness which made him a stranger in the world. His dread of solitude and his fear of death, which he took the manly way of confessing, indicate clearly enough that the hardened realist was not such a realist after all. His intellect did grasp material realities, it is true; but the other side of his nature, his emotional and imaginative life, perceived just as truly the infinite illusion which wraps us all about. But imaginative illusion, if not fortified by a vigorous balance of reason, is apt to grow into delusion and so into madness; and Johnson's sturdy sense pointed out to him the danger of a failure to control the activities of his emotions. This he preached in his moral essays, for this was what he feared most during the long hours when he was condemned to his own society.

If we turn to what he has to say upon the failure of the metaphysical poets to attain the sublime, we may perhaps discover a more tangible evidence of the influence of the Greek critic upon him. He here observes of these poets that the sublime was no more within their power than the pathetic: "for they never attempted that comprehension and expanse of thought which at once fills the mind, and of which the first effect is

1. See on the subject of the imagination, *Lives*, I, 20–21; III, 268, 440; *R.* 89.

sudden astonishment, and the second rational admiration." And he proceeds to voice critical principles important to our purpose. "Sublimity," he declares, employing the word under discussion, "is produced by aggregation, and littleness by dispersion. Great thoughts are always general, and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness. . . . Those writers who lay on the watch for novelty could have little hope of greatness; for great things cannot have escaped former observation. Their attempts were always analytick: they broke every image into fragments and could no more represent by their slender conceits and laboured particularities the prospects of nature or the scenes of life, than he who dissects a sun-beam with a prism can exhibit the wild effulgence of a summer noon." [1] Longinus similarly passes his judgment upon the search for novelty in the following parallel: "Of the second fault which we mentioned, frigidity, Timaeus is full; an able author in other respects, and not always wanting in greatness of style; . . . [but] often sinking into mere childishness from an incessant desire to start new notions." [2]

In the phrase, "great thoughts are always general," Johnson gives us what he considered worthy of the highest praise, and upon what grounds he differed from what is commonly called the Platonic, but is really the romantic, point of view. In the half-century following his death occurred the great revival of imaginative literature; and the subordination of the intellectual qualities to the emotions which marked the era tended to create a mood expressive of individual feeling and particular circumstances, rather than a universalizing and a generalizing of the experience of the individual, which had always remained the classic ideal. Johnson, as one might suppose, was one with the classicists — may indeed stand as

1. *Lives*, I, 20–21.
2. *On the Sublime*, IV. (Prickard's translation.)

the type of the classical critic, a little stiff perhaps owing to a somewhat rigid nature, but sound and sure within his field.

It will be remembered how he makes Imlac, the type of the severely classical poet, explain to Rasselas that the business of the poet is not to number the streaks of the tulip, or to describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest, but to find expression for universal truth and to represent nature as it is known to all mankind. *Rambler* 36 tells us how poetry cannot dwell on the minuter distinctions "without departing from that simplicity of grandeur which fills the imagination; nor dissect the latent qualities of things, without losing its general powers of gratifying every mind by recalling its conceptions." Here again the word *general* defines and limits the powers and reach of poetical effort and explains to what extent a mind like Johnson's would yield itself to the influence of poetry.

These last quotations from Johnson express with some finality the spirit of classical writing, revealing at the same time, it should be noted, that the imagination, however regarded, cannot be claimed as its own by any one age or school of writing. Just as Johnson employed the word *Nature* to represent the variety and the real uniformity of human experience, and Wordsworth in his use of the same term meant phenomenal nature and the identity between the human soul and the soul of the Universe, so his conception of imaginative writing distinguished itself from the more emotional outlook of the romanticists. I believe this distinction rests upon the greater emphasis which the classical writer places upon the rational or formal element in literature as against the romantic freedom which inevitably follows an age that has habitually suppressed the emotions. Johnson, usually regarded as the stalwart defender of the classic faith, is in reality a curiously transitional figure; and the extent to which he met or yielded to the new current that was gaining headway during the latter

years of his life is really so important a matter for consideration as to deserve extended treatment later in this study.

Towards Latin criticism he expressed much the same attitude that was held by the whole neo-classical tradition. One phase of neo-classicism may be defined as the interpretation of Aristotle through the medium of Horace's *Epistle to the Pisos*, which in turn was transformed by a gradual narrowing of the laws of writing. Just as the early eighteenth century imitated Horace and called its conventionalized society the Age of Augustus, it based its literary production and its criticism upon the Horatian model. Johnson, coming at a time when the impulse proceeding from this literary school was beginning to exhaust itself, yet fell heir to its traditions and especially to its critical ideas. With Boileau, he agreed that learning and diligence are essential to artistic production; that works of imagination are to be judged somewhat differently from those which afford pleasure by their elegance or their polish, but that both have their value; and that there is a literature belonging to nations which have not yet ripened to maturity, and a literature more cultivated and therefore less spontaneous and inspired. Men to whom nothing is new grow fastidious and demand knowledge recommended by artificial diction. "Thus it will be found in the progress of learning that in all nations the first writers are simple, and that every age improves in elegance. One refinement always makes way for another, and what was expedient to Virgil was necessary to Pope." And whenever his criticism cannot claim for his poets qualities of the first rank, it is ready to offer them the praise of elegance and technical finish. He employs the words, "curiosa felicitas," spoken by Petronius of Horace, of Pope's *Eloïsa to Abelard*, adding that here is shown a fruitful soil and a careful cultivation.[1]

Specific references to Horace are not numerous, and most

1. *Lives*, III, 236.

of these are but brief quotations of Horatian phrases which came pat to his purpose. Gay's *Trivia* twice breaks Horace's rule: "There is no 'dignus vindice nodus,' no difficulty that required any supernatural interposition. . . . On great occasions and on small the mind is repelled by useless and apparent falsehood." [1] Gay also lacked *mens divinior*, the dignity of genius. While Gray's *The Bard* has more force, more thought, and more variety than its original, *The Prophecy of Nereus* (Odes, I, 15), the copy has unhappily been produced at the wrong time. "The fiction of Horace was to the Romans credible; but its revival disgusts us with apparent and unconquerable falsehood. 'Incredulus odi.'" [2] This same violation of probability is assigned for his disapproval of Pope's *Imitations of Horace:* "Between Roman images and English manners there will be an irreconcilable dissimilitude, and the work will be generally uncouth and party-coloured; neither original nor translated, neither ancient nor modern." [3] These objections of his to the working over of outworn material coincide with his life-long warfare upon the pedantry of classical imitations, which had become the bane of contemporary verse and furnished to so many men of the period a mere substitute for reality. Johnson, in the name of truth and nature, broke with neo-classical imitation, making in this direction, I think, his most important contribution to the progress of criticism.

Boswell records two of Johnson's observations upon Horace which have value in explaining his theory of poetry. On the first occasion Boswell controverted Horace's maxim,

> mediocribus esse poëtis
> Non homines, non di, non concessere columnae,[4]

claiming esteem for "middle-rate" poetry and asserting that poetry should have different gradations of excellence and consequently of value. Johnson replied that, as there is no neces-

1. *Lives*, II, 284; Horace, *A. P.* 191.
2. *Lives*, III, 438; Horace, *A. P.* 188.
3. *Lives*, III, 247.
4. *A. P.* 372.

sity for poetry at all, it being merely a luxury, an instrument of pleasure, it can have no value unless when exquisite in its kind.[1] This wholly aesthetic appreciation of poetical values may be placed beside his assertion, which I have already mentioned, that the occupation he loved best was to ride in a post-chaise beside a pretty woman, as a revelation of a greater flexibility in the old moralist's nature than is usually granted to him. It suggests too that he would have made short shrift of most of the frigid verse that passed as didactic poetry during the century. At another time, when Horace's phrase *Nil admirari* as the source of happiness was under discussion, he maintained that as one advances in life one gets what is better than admiration — judgment, to estimate things at their true value.[2] Here speaks the realist, the man of disciplined mind, who conceived the function of literary criticism as the exercise of the judicial powers, the emphasis being put here rather than on the faculties of appreciation, in estimating literary merit.

Quintilian receives but brief notices, but sufficient to prove that he had been the subject of careful study. Johnson's reference to his reading at the University as being "all manly, Sir," seems an echo of the Roman's advice concerning the young orator's preparation, "Let his mode of reading, however, be, above all, manly."[3] Quintilian's *Rhetorick* was one of the works recommended to the young student in Johnson's Preface to Dodsley's *Preceptor*, 1748. Of Gray, Johnson remarks that he has a kind of strutting dignity, and is tall by walking on tiptoe; we meet, says Dr. Parr of this passage, with a similar thought in Quintilian.[4] One or two casual references to Quintilian — one citing him as authority for assigning the *Medea* to Seneca, another quoting his criticism of Lucan — occur in the *Lives of the Poets*.[5]

1. *Bos.* II, 351. 2. *Ibid.* 360. 3. *Inst.* I, 8; Bohn, 1856.
4. *Lives*, III, 440, n. 8; Parr, *Works*, IV, 324 (1856); *Inst.* II, 3.
5. *Lives*, I, 416; II, 77; *Inst.* IX, 2, 8; X, 1, 90.

But wholly aside from these isolated references to Quintilian in Johnson's works, it may safely be inferred that the Latin critic's careful analysis of the principles of composition and sober review of Greek and Latin literature would be of prime importance to a man of Johnson's classical reading and lively interest in the history of literary activity. A good many formal treatises on composition and the education of young men, such as Dodsley's *Preceptor*, 1748, to which Johnson contributed a preface, Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism*, 1762, and Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric*, 1783, appeared during the middle years of the century and comprised a good share of the critical writing that was being done at the time. After an age of extensive literary production, the results of this literary activity must be summarized, and tabulated, by a professional critic of power and authority. Such a critic Quintilian was for the Age of Augustus far more than Horace, who in truth never attempted any carefully formulated criticism, so that the work of the former remains the most complete body of applied criticism in the Latin language. And the critical principles which represent the intellectual activity of this great epoch of Roman history must have had a proportional influence upon the modern period, which accepted as its own the critical standards set by the other. Even more should this be true of the critic who performed this same service for his own age. Quintilian's writings must have become a part of Johnson's intellectual being.

Other Latin writers who were not primarily critics, such as Cicero, Seneca, and the Younger Pliny, produced incidentally a considerable amount of literary criticism, and Johnson unquestionably knew them all. One Latin writer, Macrobius (400 A.D.), was a favorite of his youth, making an especial appeal to the insatiable young scholar for his curiously out-of-the-way allusions and incursions into all sorts of anti-

quarian research.[1] In like manner, on account of its quaint pedantry and heterogeneous classical learning, he showed a fondness for Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, declaring that it was the only book that ever took him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished to rise.[2] Intellectual curiosity, which led him to study Low Dutch in his old age, was one of his distinguishing traits.[3]

As the last important representative of this tradition of classical scholarship and of a criticism based on a judgment formed by an acquaintance with Greek and Latin literature, Johnson has a good deal of significance in literary history. His learning placed him beside the great modern masters of the Latin tongue, and enabled him to frequent without embarrassment the company of any professed Grecian and to bear his share in the discourse. His mastery of these two languages, while indeed very great, qualified him to become, not a critic of texts, but rather the man of great learning; more the scholarly critic than the critical scholar, the collator of manuscripts and reviser of texts. In the literary criticism of antiquity he found those general principles which he regarded as essential to the production of any art of permanent value. Aristotle and Horace and Quintilian, the great classical masters, gave utterance to those underlying ideas upon which the structure of classical literature had been built, and found favorable soil for growth in Johnson's mind and temper. Longinus had become familiar to eighteenth-century readers through contemporary criticism, Johnson sharing in the somewhat uncomprehending recognition of the power and scope of the imagination. Indeed, because his fame in the world of letters was so great, his observations on the subject of the true sublime formed a kind of bridge connecting the two great epochs of literature between which he stood, maintaining a stalwart defence of the

1. *Bos.* I, 59. 2. *Ibid.* II, 21. 3. *Ibid.* IV, 21.

first and yet reflecting much of the varied intellectual life of the second. But more of this in another chapter.

Out of classical criticism grew the doctrines of neo-classicism, which crystallized and in turn, during the course of the seventeenth century in France, began to disintegrate under pressure of hostile forces. Johnson's relation to classic French criticism is therefore so important for our purpose as to require somewhat detailed attention. Indeed, so great is his indebtedness to the greatest of these critics, Boileau, that it will be necessary to devote a separate chapter to an extended comparison of the work of these two men, whom we may name as the representative men of letters in their respective countries during periods corresponding to each other in form and development.

The early years of the seventeenth century saw the French people quite under the control of a strongly centralized government, and the social life of the nation easily and naturally concentrated itself within the narrow limits of the capital, whose intellectual activities were easily turned into accepted channels. The age of experiment and expansion, after new modes of thought had been discovered and tested, now passed into one of rigid contraction in all lines of activity. What men conceived to be the eternal principles of correct writing had by this time established their tyranny over men of letters, and remained all-powerful until near the end of the century, when some gentlemen of liberal views succeeded in partially breaking through the tremendous power of established authority to claim recognition for the expression of individual feeling. The literary dictator became a public character, able through an authority delegated to him by political power to issue pronouncements with impunity; for behind Malherbe stood Henry IV and the whole power of an absolute government, and back of the newly formed French Academy were Richelieu and Louis XIII, eager to control the literary output of the

nation. The readiness with which the authors of the time paid suit to Louis le Grand betrays the very great hold which the Court had over men of letters.

The social and political life of England in the eighteenth century did not, it is true, follow the precise lines laid down by her sister across the Channel. The Court and the King, so commanding in their influence over the social and intellectual life of France a century before, were hardly felt in the life of the nation until George III conceived the notion that he must reign in fact as well as in name. But in a general way the conditions for literary development were similar; and just as fixed standards and an orderly progress toward the establishment of certain literary doctrines were realized in one country in the seventeenth century, the same progress, in kind if not in degree, obtained within a generation in the other. Englishmen were taking stock of their material and intellectual resources as they entered upon a long period of domestic development. A freedom from the menace of foreign warfare and the general want of contact with foreign peoples aided the national tendency to concentration. The reading public slowly increased, and the attention of the average Englishman directed itself to more varied interests.

As the century waxed, literature came to make its appeal, not merely to the little circle of wits comprising fashionable town life, but more and more to the great middle class which was beginning to make its power felt in the nation. The time was ripe for some sort of literary dictator, and Dr. Johnson, himself a distinguished member of that middle class, became the acknowledged censor of public taste and public morals for a very large part of the nation.[1]

1. Johnson has an interesting comment upon Dryden's literary dictatorship in *Lives*, I, 396: "He has been described as magisterially presiding over the younger writers, and assuming the distribution of poetical fame; but he who excels has a right to teach, and he whose judgement is incontestable may, without usurpation, examine and decide."

This English dictatorship, it should be noted, was not precisely similar to that of the Frenchmen Malherbe and Chapelain and Boileau, who issued their literary decrees as it were by royal fiat, and exerted an authority over their contemporaries not wholly comparable to that of Rymer and Gildon and Dennis, Addison and Pope and Johnson, their nearest English parallels. The English critics possessed no power beyond the eminence of their position in literature and their sheer personal force. After them came the revolt from all authority which has extended to this day.

Our first natural comparison of Johnson is with the celebrated dictator of taste who flourished in the early years of the preceding century. Johnson's acquaintance with Malherbe seems to have been gained chiefly through the biography by his pupil Racan (1589–1670). *Rambler* 60 cites an incident from this as an example of trivial gossip.[1] A reference to Malherbe, with a specific bearing upon his criticism, occurs in the comment upon Dryden's *Astraea Redux*, in which he quotes the following lines as showing how far the poet was yet from thinking it necessary to found his sentiments on nature:

> It is no longer motion cheats your view;
> As you meet it, the land approacheth you;
> The land returns, and in the white it wears
> The marks of penitence and sorrow bears.

He then recounts the story of a French poet reading to Malherbe some verses, in which he represents France as moving out of its place to receive the king, and Malherbe's reply, "Though this was in my time, I do not remember it."[2]

1. On the dignity and usefulness of biography. "Nor can I think myself overpaid for the time spent in reading the life of Malherb, by being enabled to relate, after the learned biographer, that Malherb had two predominant opinions: one, that the looseness of a single woman might destroy all her boast of ancient descent; the other, that the French beggars made use very improperly and barbarously of the phrase *noble gentleman*, because either word included the sense of both."

2. *Lives*, I, 428.

The "tyrant of words and syllables" could not have been altogether uncongenial to a man of Johnson's rationalizing habit of mind, and there was just enough of the neo-classical reasonableness in him to suggest a comparison with Malherbe. His application of reason to a detailed study of Pope's Epitaphs, which indeed required just this sort of criticism, may be compared with the Frenchman's famous commentary on the sonnets of Desportes. His slaughter of the odes of Gray is an example of the method gone astray.

The French Academy, bulwark of the classic spirit and the conserver of the purity of the French tongue, bears a direct relation to the opinions of the first great English lexicographer, who a century later performed a task which the forty immortals had done for another language before him. By his massive *Dictionary* he had made himself the acknowledged authority on the subject of English lexicography, and it was because of his accomplishment in this direction that he was honored by his university with the degree of Doctor of Laws. His *Plan of an English Dictionary*, addressed to Lord Chesterfield in 1747, and his elaborate *Preface*, published with the completed work in 1755, embody his views concerning the preservation of the language and the practicability of an English Academy. His explanation of his endeavors, at the beginning of the *Preface*, reveals what was his feeling on the subject: "I have attempted . . . a Dictionary of the English language, which, while it was employed in the cultivation of every species of literature, has itself been hitherto neglected; suffered to spread, under the direction of chance, into wild exuberance; resigned to the tyranny of time and fashion; and exposed to the corruptions of ignorance, and caprices of innovation." It being the great end of the undertaking to fix the English language, he considers the question of orthography, citing the controversy in France, in which the etymologist contended with popular custom for the preserva-

tion of established spelling. The rule which he proposed to himself in making his *Dictionary* was "to make no innovation without sufficient reason to balance the inconvenience of change; and such reasons I do not expect often to find. All change is of itself an evil, which ought not to be hazarded but for evident advantage; and as inconstancy is in every case a mark of weakness, it will add nothing to the reputation of our tongue. There are, indeed, . . . some who seem to take pleasure in departing from custom, and to think alteration desirable for its own sake; and the reformation of our orthography, which these writers have attempted, should not pass without its due honours, but that I suppose they hold singularity its own reward or may dread the fascination of lavish praise."

This stalwart conservatism toward change of any sort makes pretty clear what would have been the nature of his reflections if he had become cognizant of some recent attempts to legislate spelling reforms into the schools. He refers to irregularities in English grammar as spots of barbarity impressed so deep in the English language that criticism can never wash them away. In temper then he was wholly congenial to the efforts of the French Academy to preserve the purity of the French tongue. Of the habit of branding impure or barbarous words, he asserts that, if well performed, it would be equivalent to Boileau's proposal to the Academicians "that they should review all their polite writers, and correct such impurities as might be found in them, that their authority might not contribute, at any distant time, to the depravation of the language." But he proceeds to point out the original error of the French Academy in rejecting terms of science, and notes how they were obliged to relax the rigor of their determination by allowing these terms gradually to become naturalized among the natives. He sensibly refuses to imitate them in an error which they had since retracted, and thus "deprive the book of its chief use by scrupulous distinctions."

But, while he could not avoid a passing regret that language must be in a state of constant change, he recognized that it was but the work of a pedant to check its natural growth. "I am not so lost in lexicography," he says, "as to forget that *words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven.* Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas: I wish, however, that the instrument might be less apt to decay, and that signs might be permanent, like the things which they denote." With this hope academies have been instituted, but their vigilance has been in vain; the French and Italians have found to their cost how little power they really have; "sounds are too volatile and subtile for legal restraints; to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength. The French language has visibly changed under the inspection of the academy; the style of Amelot's translation of father Paul is observed by Le Courayer to be *un peu passé;* and no Italian will maintain, that the diction of any modern writer is not perceptibly different from that of Boccace, Machiavel, or Caro." Swift's "petty treatise" had advocated that no word be allowed to become obsolete; "but what makes a word obsolete, more than general agreement to forbear it? and how shall it be continued, when it conveys an offensive idea, or recalled again into the mouths of mankind, when it has once become unfamiliar by disuse, and unpleasing by unfamiliarity?"

Johnson also recognized that the English people had never submitted to any authority, which could enforce the enactments of an academy, and his sturdy English nature quickly rebelled against any plan which might tend to bind English minds to the observance of rules laid down by legislative fiat. He hopes, indeed, that the spirit of English liberty will hinder the establishment of any such tyranny, for, he declares, he would never in any manner wish to see dependence multiplied.

After saying that the Italian Academy did succeed in its intention of refining and preserving the language, and the French somewhat less so, he continues: "In this country an academy could be expected to do but little. If an academician's place were profitable it would be given by interest; if attendance were gratuitous it would be rarely paid, and no man would endure the least disgust. Unanimity is impossible, and debate would separate the assembly.

"But suppose the philological decree made and promulgated, what would be its authority? In absolute governments there is sometimes a general reverence paid to all that has the sanction of power and the countenance of greatness. How little this is the state of our country needs not to be told. We live in an age in which it is a kind of publick sport to refuse all respect that cannot be enforced. The edicts of an English academy would be read by many, only that they might be sure to disobey them.

"That our language is in perpetual danger of corruption cannot be denied; but what prevention can be found? The present manners of the nation would deride authority, and therefore nothing is left but that every writer should criticize himself." [1]

Johnson in these extended remarks reveals a curious blending of strong conservatism and regret for the unattainable, scorn of the lowness of English manners, anger at the increasing insubordination among the people, and a patriotic pride in the impossibility of free Englishmen yielding to the domination of absolutism, whatever advantages such a condition might

1. *Lives*, I, 233. See also *Ibid.* III, 16. "The certainty and stability which, contrary to all experience, he [Swift] thinks attainable, he proposes to secure by instituting an academy; the decrees of which every man would have been willing, and many would have been proud to disobey, and which, being renewed by successive elections, would in a short time have differed from itself." Swift's "petty treatise" is entitled, "A Proposal for correcting, improving, and ascertaining the English Tongue, in a Letter to the Earl of Oxford," 1712.

bring. It remained for Matthew Arnold to instruct the English people in what they had lost through their incorrigibly romantic temper.

Johnson makes few references to the criticism of Corneille and Racine, but there can be little doubt that he knew it as a part of the literary history of the seventeenth century. The Quarrel of the *Cid* and Corneille's subsequent *Discourses*, in which he endeavored to reconcile his practice with the rules of Aristotle, could not fail to be of extreme interest to the critic who was to give the final blow to the domination of the Unities. His comparison of Corneille to Shakespeare as a clipped hedge to a forest[1] refers directly to the critical problem that had been agitating the minds of Shakespearean commentators for half a century. Boswell reports his declaring that we may "institute a criticism between Shakespeare and Corneille, as they both had, though in a different degree, the lights of a latter age."[2] In his *Preface* to Shakespeare he describes the work of a correct and regular writer as a "garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers," whereas the composition of Shakespeare is likened to a forest, "in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower into the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity." This reflection follows indeed some remarks upon Addison's *Cato*, but *Cato* had taken the place of Corneille among the critics as the model of the regular drama and had been more than once brought into contrast with barbarian Shakespeare. Doubtless Johnson thought of Corneille's struggles within the bonds of the rules when he penned this.[3]

1. *Misc.* I, 187. 2. *Bos.* IV, 16.

3. See Thomas Warton's *Enthusiast, or The Lover of Nature*, for such a comparison.

Racine's preface to his *Bajazet* is referred to directly in the criticism of Dryden's *Aureng Zebe:* "His country is at such a distance that the manners might be safely falsified and the incidents feigned; for remoteness of place is remarked by Racine to afford the same conveniences to a poet as length of time." [1]

Molière, as we have seen, "went round the world," but it is a question how clearly Johnson perceived the drift of the dramatist's teachings towards the free-thinking of the eighteenth century. The Frenchman's conscious revolt from authority in the name of nature allies him more nearly with Fielding than with any other eighteenth-century English man of letters, and "barren rascal" might well have been transferred from the Doctor's vocabulary to Molière also. At least the new "libertinism" exemplified by the great comic dramatist seems hardly compatible with the ancient conservatism of the English Tory champion.

What he thought of Molière's attacks upon the pedants cannot with any exactness be ascertained; perhaps he might have found in Vadius points of resemblance to himself. At any rate, the ridicule of the *précieuse* spirit among the French could not but be congenial to the author of the dissertation on the metaphysical poets. In *Idler* 46 Johnson, following the lead of Addison, has burlesqued the affectations of the Learned Ladies. Molly Quick, a country girl in the service of a fine lady, fails to comprehend the directions of her mistress when couched in the conventional circumlocutions of the day. "Another time as I was dressing her head, she began to talk on a sudden of *Medusa*, and *snakes*, and *men turned into stone, and maids that, if they were not watched, would let their mistresses be Gorgons*. I looked round me half frightened, and quite

1. *Lives*, I, 360. "On peut dire que le respect que l'on a pour les héros s'augmente à mesure qu'ils s'éloignent de nous. *Major et longinquo reverentia.* L'éloignement des païs répare en quelque sorte la trop grande proximité de temps."

bewildered; till at last, finding that her literature was thrown away upon me, she bid me, with great vehemence, reach the curling irons." This is hardly the language of a serving-maid and consequently lacks the lightness of both Addison and Molière; but it reveals the elephantine moralist trying to ridicule the same thing as his two predecessors.[1]

An attempt has been made to draw an elaborate comparison between the society of the Thrales, in which Johnson found himself during his latter years, and the *précieuse* society of the Hôtel de Rambouillet.[2] Johnson's aptness at impromptu verses and his relish of some of the *bons mots* of Ménage (1613–92) and Benserade (1613–91),[3] two of the members of this circle, have been cited as evidence that he was favorably inclined to such society. But even the most superficial study of Johnson's temperament and those of his friends would show that they do not have many points of contact with the effeminate affectations of the courtly French circle. Above all things the old Doctor loved the play of wit and intellectual activity, but he was too vigorous and masculine, and very often too downright, to indulge in the prettinesses and dainty drawing-room repartee of the society Molière delighted to ridicule. However similar the circle in which Lord Chesterfield and Horace Walpole moved might have been to the aristocratic *salon* of the preceding century, certainly it is a far cry to the man who once ruled the society of a tavern. Johnson possessed in a high degree quickness of wit, and he was extraordinarily fond of intellectual entertainment, but his imperious temper and insistent self-assertion inevitably

1. "MAROTTE: Dame! je n'entens point le latin, et je n'ai pas appris, comme vous, la filosofie dans *le grand Cyrus*." *Prec. Rid.* Sc. 6. "Voilà un nécessaire qui demande si vous êtes en commodité d'être visibles." *Ibid.*

2. Dr. Robert Kleuker, *Dr. Johnson's Verhältnis zur französischen Literatur* (Strassburg, 1907), pp. 55–59.

3. *Bos.* II, 241; III, 341, n. 1. *Menagiana, ou les bons mots et remarques critiques, historiques, morales et d'érudition de M. Ménage recueillies par ses amis.* Paris, 1693.

prevented anything like the delicate interchange of wit and sentiment.[1]

The minor critics and literary disputants of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth may be dismissed briefly. The mid-century pedestrian critics, many of them Jesuit Fathers carrying over their assumption of authority

1. It is interesting to note the apt translation Johnson once made of Benserade's *A son Lit*:

BENS: Théâtre des ris et des pleurs,
Lit! où je nais, et où je meurs,
Tu nous fais voir comment voisins
Sont nos plaisirs et nos chagrins.

JOHNSON: In bed we laugh, in bed we cry,
And born in bed, in bed we die;
The near approach a bed may shew,
Of human bliss to human woe. [*Misc.* I, 195.]

When the French verses of a certain pantomime were quoted thus:

Je suis Cassandre descendue des cieux,
Pour vous fair [*sic*] entendre, mesdames et messieurs,
Que je suis Cassandre descendue des cieux;

he cried out gaily and suddenly, almost in a moment,

I am Cassandra come down from the sky,
To tell each by-stander what none can deny,
That I am Cassandra come down from the sky.

Others of these parodies have to do with his attitude toward the imitations of ancient ballads; perhaps the most delightful of all may find its place here. The pretty Italian verses at the end of Baretti's book called *Easy Phraseology* he did *all' improviso* in the same manner:

Viva! viva la padrona!
Tutta bella, e tutta buona,
La padrona è un angiolella
Tutta buona e tutta bella;
Tutta bella e tutta buona;
Viva! viva la padrona!

Long may live my lovely Hetty!
Always young and always pretty,
Always pretty, always young,
Live my lovely Hetty long!
Always young and always pretty;
Long may live my lovely Hetty!

Mrs. Thrale's Christian name was Hester. [*Misc.* I, 193-95.]

from theology into literature, who had such an immense influence upon contemporary ideas, had long passed into oblivion before Johnson began his studies. Le Bossu, preceptor of Dryden and Addison, Bouhours, Dubos, and Rapin are honored by incidental mention.

In his treatment of the moral of *Paradise Lost* he mentions Le Bossu by name as being of the opinion that the poet's first work is to find a moral which his fable is afterwards to illustrate and establish. He adds that this seems to have been the process only of Milton; "the moral of other poems is incidental and consequent; in Milton's only it is essential and intrinsick."[1] In the same connection he declares that by the common consent of critics the first praise of genius is due to the writer of an epic poem, as it requires an assemblage of all the powers which are singly sufficient for other compositions. "Epick poetry undertakes to teach the most important truths by the most pleasing precepts, and therefore relates some great event in the most affecting manner."[2] This has a good deal of resemblance to Le Bossu's observation that the epic should form manners by instruction under the guise of allegory, probable, diverting, and marvellous.[3]

The *Preface* to *The Preceptor* recommends Bossu and Father Bouhours in French as men from whom the art of poetry will be best learned. Bouhours and the Abbé Dubos are twice mentioned in Boswell by name: once as noted just above; and again in connection with a comment on Burke's *Essay on the Sublime and the Beautiful*, in which Johnson declares that these

1. *Lives*, I, 171. "La première chose par où l'on doit commencer pour faire une Fable, est de choisir l'instruction et le pointe de Morale qui lui doit servir de fond, selon le dessein et la fin que l'on se propose. . . . Il faut en suite reduire cette vérité morale en action, et en feindre une générale et unitée, sur les actions singulières et véritables de ceux qui sont ruinés par leur mauvaise intélligence." *Traité du Poëme Épique*, ch. 3.

2. *Lives*, I, 171.

3. *Traité du Poëme Épique*, ch. 3.

two critics show all beauty to depend on truth.[1] Rapin is dismissed briefly in a remark that he could not easily be imagined to have very accurately perused the books he praised or censured; and St. Evremond by the contemptuous observation that, though he had lived the greater part of his life upon an English pension, he never condescended to understand the language of the nation that maintained him.[2]

One of these critics, the Abbé Dubos, whose *Rêflexions sur la poêsie et la peinture* appeared in 1719, marks the beginning of the long struggle between the ancient humanism and the modern naturalistic spirit which has distinguished the criticism of the last two centuries. His theory concerning the influence of climate on character was expanded in the hands of Diderot and Montesquieu into a systematic study of the physiology of individuals and of nations, and has tended in the sphere of morals to usurp the classic theory of human responsibility. From this beginning has followed the whole dreary course of scientific naturalism down to its present dismal failure as an adequate explanation of human action.

Dubos, in this connection, exploits the theory of the ruling passion, or, as it was also called, the master faculty, defining and limiting a man's genius to particular fields of activity. Speaking of the innate tendencies of children and the influence of education upon them, he says that, though children are restrained by their education, the inclinations which they have as a result of their physical birth remain as long as they live.[3] Every kind of poetry, he claims, demands a special talent, and nature could scarcely grant a superior talent to a man except through the exclusion of other talents.[4]

It is of the utmost importance, if we are to give Johnson his proper place in criticism, to make quite clear, at an early point in this study, just what constituted his humanism.

1. *Bos.* II, 90.
2. *Lives*, I, 272.
3. *Rêflexion*, II, 355.
4. *Ibid.* 75.

Pope's embodiment of the above-mentioned doctrine in his *Moral Essays*, seemingly returning to the ancient theory, drawn from medieval medicine and astrology, which made the four humors the controlling factors in the characters of men, gave Johnson his point of departure. As defender of the free will and Christian morals and as opponent of every form of nascent romanticism, he rose to the combat. Characteristically, he first of all defines the true genius as a mind of large general powers accidentally determined to some particular direction, even being persuaded that, had Sir Isaac Newton applied himself to poetry, he could have made a very fine epic poem; "I could as easily apply to law as to tragic poetry." Doubtless this last remark needs no support.[1] With particular reference to Pope he says: "Of any passion thus innate and irresistible the existence may reasonably be doubted. Human characters are by no means constant; men change by change of place, of fortune, of acquaintance; he who is at one time a lover of pleasure is at another a lover of money." The tendency of the doctrine, he declares, is to produce the belief in a kind of moral predestination or overruling principle which cannot be resisted; "he that admits it is prepared to comply with every desire that caprice or opportunity shall excite, and to flatter himself that he submits only to the lawful dominion of Nature in obeying the resistless authority of his 'ruling Passion.'"[2]

Johnson's use of nature in this connection is significant as it represents his recognition of the naturalistic problem and his distinction between it and the nature of the humanist. Speaking of the freedom of the will, he had declared that all experience favored it while all theory was against it, though at another time he cried, evidently exasperated, "We *know* our will is free, and *there 's* an end on 't."[3] He did not, in fact, care

1. *Lives*, I, 2. See also *Misc.* I, 314; II, 287; *Bos.* V, 35.
2. *Lives*, III, 174.
3. *Bos.* II, 82; IV, 329; III, 290.

for metaphysical speculations which could have no direct bearing on the conduct of life, or, if they did, served but to lead the individual into error. Witness his misinterpretation, wilful or no, of Berkeley's "denial of the existence of matter." "I refute it thus," he cried, striking his foot against a stone until it rebounded.[1] His declaration that Hume had gone to milk the bull was the manner in which he disposed of philosophical scepticism.[2]

He went further and doubted the influence of the weather and of climate upon men's minds, and proceeded to refute with some finality the substance of Dubos's *Réflexions* upon this subject.[3] He declared that anyone who thought himself weather-bound might find, "with a little help from hellebore," that he was merely idle or exhausted, the very notion producing the inability it supposes, by which phrase he anticipated modern researches in self-hypnotism and other aspects of the sub-conscious life.[4] *Idler* 11 has an observation upon the influence of the imagination operating upon luxury. "He that shall resolutely excite his faculties, or exert his virtues, will soon make himself superior to the seasons." Gray, too, had a notion that he could not write but at certain times or at happy moments—"a fantastick foppery, to which my kindness for a man of learning and of virtue wishes him to have been superior." [5]

Now Johnson had been used to turn out all sorts of literature at the call of hunger and the bookseller, and he knew from painful experience that he could obtain command over his mind whenever he wished, "if he set himself doggedly to it." [6] His consciousness of his powers and his mastery over them did

1. *Bos.* I, 471. 2. *Ibid.* 444.

3. *Réflexions*, Part II, Section XIV: "Comment il se peut faire que les causes physiques ayent part à la destinée des siècles illustres. Du pouvoir de l'air sur le corps humain." Part II, Section XVII: "De l'étendue des climats plus propres aux arts et aux sciences que les autres."

4. *Lives*, I, 137–38. 5. *Lives*, III, 433. 6. *Bos.* I, 203.

not persuade him to offer any ready sympathy to those lesser men whose wills were less supreme. A failure to comprehend the manifestations of that phenomenon which we commonly call genius but which sometimes goes by the name of the artistic temperament may have had something to do with the general tone of these remarks.

To make his position consistent, he denied the effect of climate upon the mind of man, expressing his contempt for the opinion sometimes finding reception among wise men, which "restrains the operations of the mind to particular regions, and supposes that a luckless mortal may be born in a degree of latitude too high or too low for wisdom or for wit." "From this fancy, wild as it is," Milton had not freed himself, "when he feared lest the 'climate' of his country might be 'too cold' for flights of imagination." [1]

In all this antagonism toward what he considered the unwarranted assumptions of natural science, Johnson does not, as it might appear at first glance, attempt to obscure the revelations of truth; indeed, in the name of a truth higher than can be discovered in the laboratory he stands for the human will and man's responsibility for the course of his actions. "Our will is free, and there 's an end on 't," let us repeat, as indicating his position with reference to the fundamentals of all reasonable faith. Even though a certain obtuseness may seem to enter into his remarks on Milton and Gray, he saw clearly how such doctrines if pushed to a logical conclusion were bound to result in such excesses as we have witnessed in modern naturalism.

In view of the above, Johnson's liking for the *Dictionary* of Pierre Bayle requires a moment of attention. The share of

1. *Lives*, I, 138. See Dubos, *Réflexions*, II, 261–62: "[Cette maladie] est un instinct qui nous avertit que l'air où nous nous trouvons, n'est pas aussi convenable à notre constitution que celui pour lequel un secret instinct nous fait soupirer . . . un air différent de celui auquel on est habitué est une source d'indisposition et de maladies."

this other great French "libertine" and encyclopedist in breaking down traditional standards and preparing the way for the free thinking of the eighteenth century does not seem to have been sufficiently remarked by Johnson either in conversation or in his written work. It is hardly possible that he could have been blind to the influence of the *Dictionary* at this period in undermining the props of authority; and yet, if he realized what must have seemed to him the immense harm the work was accomplishing, would he not have protested against it with all his power? Was his delight in the large amount of literary biography and literary gossip in which the work abounded sufficient to turn him from the contemplation of any moral harm which it might seem to exert?

His references to Bayle suggest that he was not averse to a critical examination of current questions. When some one had referred to a confutation of Bayle by Leibnitz, he cried angrily: "A confutation of Bayle, Sir! What part of Bayle do you mean? The greatest part of his writings is not confutable; it is historical and critical. . . . Leibnitz was as paltry a fellow as I know."[1] On another occasion he said, "Bayle's *Dictionary* is a very useful work for those to consult who love the biographical part of literature, which is what I love most."[2] His proposed *Annals of Literature*, it will be remembered, was intended to imitate Bayle, and others among the French journals of literature.[3]

It was this interest in biography, no doubt, which led him to find entertainment in the Frenchman. It may be well here to pause a moment to consider how Johnson's love of biography is distinguished from the interest which some later critics have found in it, that we may once more make clear the immense gulf lying between his humanism and the modern way of looking at the individual as a sort of physical mechanism played upon by outward circumstance. He went to Bayle for reasons

1. *Bos.* V, 287. 2. *Ibid.* I, 425. 3. *Ibid.* 285.

different from those which led great modern critics like Sainte-Beuve or Taine to the same source. His were absolute standards, acquired, he believed, through the experience of many men and many ages, by which he might judge the work of an author, and he did not attempt to seek in a man's life and in that of his family material which might determine the merit of his literary achievement. The incipient naturalism of Bishop Hurd had disgusted him. "Hurd, Sir," he declared, "is one of a set of men who account for every thing systematically; for instance, it has been a fashion to wear scarlet breeches; these men would tell you, that according to causes and effects, no other wear could at that time have been chosen." [1] His interest in biography was that of a professed humanist, whose philosophy rested upon a lively interest in men as men, not in men through books, nor in men in relation to nature; and, because he felt so deeply that a careful training of the will and character must be at the base of any sound moral philosophy, he sought to aid the cause of common morality by his own biographical contributions. "Biography," he says in *Idler* 34, "is of the various kinds of narrative writing, that which is most eagerly applied to the purposes of life." With this aim, he has made the literary history of his century something of real importance to us of another generation.

1. *Bos.* IV, 189.

CHAPTER IV

Johnson and Boileau

With Boileau, the chief exponent of French classicism, Johnson had many and striking affinities. It is but natural that the last important representative of the classical spirit in eighteenth-century England should have turned to Boileau as the great master of modern criticism. We find Mrs. Piozzi saying that Johnson was a great reader of French literature and delighted exceedingly in Boileau's works; Murphy asserts that he was an outspoken admirer of Boileau; and Thomas Tyers after Johnson's death informs us that he had lately read over his Boileau.[1] Perhaps as he grew older and confirmed his critical dogmas he returned more and more to the former masters of classical criticism. He himself declares that "Boileau will seldom be found mistaken," and that "he surely is no mean writer to whom Boileau shall be found inferior."

The doctrines and characters of these two men, who represented the culmination of neo-classical criticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, resembled each other in many ways. Both possessed strong reasoning faculties and minds rather logical than imaginative, though Boileau revealed during a long period of critical activity a surer taste and a sensitiveness to aesthetic values, gaining for himself the distinction of being the literary mentor of the chief writers of the Golden Age of French literature; both preached virtue and morality, though in this respect Johnson outstripped his predecessor in

1. Tyers, it is true, says that he (Johnson) took neither Aristotle, Bossu, nor Boileau "from the shelf." *Misc.* II, 372.

weight and influence, becoming peculiarly the spokesman of a large section of English life. The two men endeavored to base their criticism on the primary classical virtues of judgment and reason and good sense; both lacked a clear and definite historic sense, Boileau giving evidence of this in his contempt for the French Renaissance and the work the Pléiade had done for the cause of classicism, Johnson in his general ignorance of the literature before and during the age of Shakespeare, particularly of the English drama; both, finally, believed themselves to be men of the world, laying much stress upon intercourse with all sorts of men as a primary qualification of a man of letters, Johnson perhaps the more so in view of his consciousness of his own uncouth manners and uncourtly presence.

Upon this last point they were in entire agreement. Boileau's advice to cultivate one's friends, to converse and to live,

> Que les vers ne soient pas votre éternel emploi,
> Cultivez vos amis, soyez homme de foi;
> C'est peu d'être agréable et charmant dans un livre;
> Il faut savoir encore et converser et vivre,[1]

and his "Étudiez la cour et connoissez la ville," can be matched by many of Johnson's observations. His great fondness for intellectual give and take has already received comment. He loved the city, remarking that when a man grows tired of London he grows tired of life, "for there is in London all that life can afford." To him London was a "heaven upon earth" and Fleet Street was preferable to the beauties of rural nature, notwithstanding the fact that the satire *London* is concerned with the advantages of country life in point of moral healthfulness and of human happiness. Writing to Bennet Langton, he quoted "que les vers," etc., and urged him to seek the society of his fellows and so get rid of that voluntary debility which modern life is content to term ignorance. Two papers in the

1. *A. P.* IV, 121–24.

Rambler, numbers 157 and 159, doubtless in general spirit autobiographical, describe the embarrassments a scholar endures from his own bashfulness. In *Rambler* 137 he quotes Bacon, "books can never teach the use of books," an observation similar to the one recorded by Boswell, "books without the knowledge of life are useless, for what should books teach but the art of living?" *Adventurer* 85, entitled, "Study, composition, and converse equally necessary to intellectual accomplishment," is a sensible paper giving his views in detail. In this he observes, "to spend life in poring upon books, is only to imbibe prejudices, to obstruct and embarrass the powers of nature, to cultivate memory at the expense of judgment, and to bury reason under a chaos of indigested learning"; concluding his essay with these words, "To read, write, and converse in due proportions, is, therefore, the business of a man of letters." *Rambler* 173 defines pedantry as "the unseasonable ostentation of learning," and describes the man guilty of pedantry as one who, master of some abstruse and uncultivated part of knowledge, strives to inflict himself upon the uninitiated to the total neglect of their wishes. Another definition of pedantry, occurring in the *Life of Cowley*, is worth quotation: "that minute knowledge which is derived from particular sciences and studies, in opposition to the general notions supplied by a wide survey of life and nature."[1] This should be compared to Boileau's merciless warfare upon the pedants, to make clear how closely Johnson approximated to the classical spirit of decorum and good breeding which Boileau represented in his time. Many of Johnson's poets are censured for this defect of pedantry. William Broome is described as "a contracted scholar and a mere versifyer, unacquainted with life, and unskilful in conversation";[2] Milton had read much and knew what books could teach, but he had mingled little in the world and was deficient in worldly experience;[3] and John

1. *Lives*, I, 55. 2. *Ibid.* III, 75. 3. *Ibid.* I, 189.

Phillips's *Blenheim* was the poem of a scholar, "who writes books from books, and studies the world in a college." [1]

This hatred of the pedant, who sees life through false spectacles, is at the very basis of Boileau's theory of art. He constantly insists upon reason and good sense as essential to the expression of truth and nature, and enjoins the poet to keep these two latter as the sole objects of his endeavor. Nature is, of course, to him the manifold expression of human nature in the polished society of court and city. His charge to the poet is significant:

> Que la nature donc soit votre étude unique;

and again: [2]

> Aimez donc la raison; que toujours vos écrits
> Empruntent d'elle seule et leur lustre et leur prix.

The dramatist pleases "par la raison seule"; rhyme is necessary to the drama because it accords with good sense, which in turn marches under the yoke of reason.[3]

Upon nature and truth is founded his theory of the *vraisemblable*, the nature of which shall be determined by good sense and reason. "Tout doit tendre au bon sens," he asserts, because thereby the poet may learn nature.[4]

> Le faux est toujours fade, ennuyeux, languissant:
> Mais la nature est vraie, et d'abord on la sent.

Truth, "du mensonge vainqueur," is the chief end of all writing: [5]

> Rien n'est beau que le vrai; le vrai seul est aimable;
> Il doit régner partout, et même dans la fable;
> De toute fiction l'adroite fausseté
> Ne tend qu'à faire aux yeux briller la vérité.

1. *Lives*, I, 317. Note also what he has to say of the age of Shakespeare: "Mankind was not then to be studied in the closet; he that would know the world, was under the necessity of gleaning his own remarks, by mingling as he would in its business and amusements." *Works*, V, 131.

2. *A. P.* III, 359; I, 37–38.

3. *Ibid.* III, 423; I, 28; 33.

4. *Ibid.* I, 45; *Épître* IX, 85–86.

5. *Ibid.* IX, 53; 43–46.

Probability is violated when truth is no longer observed:[1]

> Jamais au spectateur n'offrez rien d'incroyable;
> Le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas vraisemblable.

Johnson never formulated an art of poetry for the benefit of the aspiring maker of verses, and we do not find any categorical declaration of principles, but his works do offer abundant examples of definitions bearing strong resemblance to those of Boileau. Good sense, for example, constitutes a fundamental principle of Pope's intellectual character, "a prompt and intuitive perception of consonance and propriety."[2] This principle of good sense, underlying the literary production of the whole age of Pope, gives the key of Johnson's hearty acceptance of it, notwithstanding certain obvious limitations, which he was not unwilling to point out on occasion. He defines poetry as "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason"; in which definition, it should be noted, imagination comes to the aid of reason; not the reverse process, as might have been the case a half-century later.[3] We have evidence concerning his conception of nature and art in the following passage, which deserves full quotation: "What is meant by 'judge of nature' is not easy to say. Nature is not the object of human judgement; for it is vain to judge where we cannot alter. If by nature is meant, what is commonly called *nature* by the criticks, a just representation of things really existing and actions really performed, nature cannot be properly opposed to *art*; nature being, in this sense, only the best effect of *art*."[4] Nature, then, is "a just representation of things really existing," and this becomes the final test which he applied to all forms of art — to the romances, to the metaphysical poets, to Shakespeare. The noblest beauties of art are co-extended, in his mind, with rational nature; and he

1. *A. P.* III, 47–48.
2. *Lives*, III, 216.
3. *Ibid.* I, 170.
4. *Ibid.* III, 255.

adds, "or at least with the whole circle of polished life," falling into agreement with Boileau in his ultimate conception of what *nature* should mean; "what is less than this can be only pretty, the plaything of fashion and the amusement of a day."[1] His *Preface to Shakespeare* abounds in like principles. "Nothing can please many, and please long," he says there, "but just representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and, therefore, few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth." Shakespeare's great merit is therefore that he holds the mirror up to nature and describes events, so that "from his plays a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions." These are fairly complete statements of classical doctrine, and they reflect the permanent positions of their author upon this central critical problem.

Like Boileau, he rests his *nature* upon truth: for not only can he say that writers of fiction are "just copiers of human manners," but he can also declare that the legitimate end of fiction is truth, truth becoming indeed the very basis of all excellence of whatever sort.[2] So, the circle which Boileau drew is again complete; beginning with reason and good sense as essential to good writing, Johnson proceeds to nature, which he defines as the element of reality in all things, and finally rests upon truth as the great foundation and test of poetry since the world began. Beyond this declaration of principles classical criticism did not permit itself to go.

1. *Lives*, III, 333.

2. *R.* 4; *Lives*, I, 271; I, 6. See *Ibid.* I, 174. "The substance of the narrative [i. e., *Paradise Lost*] is truth; and as truth allows no choice, it is, like necessity, superior to rule." Many other references to this subject occur in the *Lives*. See *Ibid.* I, 177–78; 348–49; II, 315; III, 226.

Fundamentally, therefore, their critical principles are the same. Their attitude to the rules is also, as might be inferred, practically identical, both critics valuing them rather as a check upon a writer's genius than as any *sine qua non* of conformity. Boileau's opinion is, as usual, clearly expressed. In describing the censor whom he recommends to the aspiring poet, he says:

> C'est lui qui vous dira par quel transport heureux
> Quelquefois dans sa course un esprit vigoureux,
> Trop resserré par l'art, sort des règles prescrites,
> Et de l'art même apprend à franchir leur limites.[1]

The poet is made, not by rules, but "du ciel l'influence secrète,"[2] though, if he would create what the world would wish to live, he must submit to the salutary check of certain laws which human experience has found to be necessary. Malherbe receives his meed of praise in the *Art Poétique* for his purification of the French tongue and his reduction of the muse to the rules of duty. Owing to the pressure exerted by a number of youthful insurgent writers during the last years of his life, the venerable dictator grew more tolerant concerning the rules, especially so in the *Réflexions sur Longin* and the *Lettre à Perrault*, in which his concession to the growing individualism at the end of the century marks the beginning of the downfall of French neo-classicism.

Johnson, living nearly a century later, shows considerably more freedom within the rules than Boileau, at least the Boileau of the *Art Poétique* period. To him the rules were no inevitable combination of nature, truth, and reason, attained through centuries of critical experience, nor was their application to be rigid and tactless; but they meant rather a useful

1. *A. P.* IV, 77–80.
2. *Ibid.* I, 3. See also *Satire*, II, 85–86.

> Malheureux mille fois celui dont la manie
> Veut aux règles de l'art asservir son génie!

approximation of truth and reason which might be attained by a well-trained judgment and a common sense that had been created by long association with the best in the world. In *Rambler* 158 — and it may be stated by the way that Johnson gave voice to many of his soundest critical principles in these early periodicals — he declares that criticism, although practised from the earliest ages, has not attained the certainty and stability of a science. He maintains that the rules hitherto received are seldom drawn from any settled principle or self-evident postulate, or adapted to the natural and invariable constitution of things; but are rather the arbitrary edicts of self-authorized legislators, who selected them sometimes through caprice, sometimes through idleness or timidity, and prohibited new experiments of wit, restrained fancy from the indulgence of her innate inclination to hazard and adventure, and condemned all future flights of genius to pursue the "path of the Meonian eagle." He continues with the following significant words: "We owe few of the rules of writing to the acuteness of criticks, who have generally no other merit than that, having read the works of great authors with attention, they have observed the arrangement of their matter, or the graces of their expression, and then expected honour and reverence for precepts which they never could have invented; so that practice has introduced rules, rather than rules have directed practice."

This pronouncement of his at first glance looks like sheer rebellion, and it may indeed be taken as one of the saner utterances of a man who, notwithstanding an established reputation for ruthless neo-classicism, was continually rising above the limitations of a vicious school of literature. Rules drawn from precedent, he asserts further on in the same paper, rather than from reason make the faults of the authors and the errors of the critics dangerous objects of imitation; "as the Ciceronians of the sixteenth century were betrayed into barbarisms by corrupt copies of their darling writer." Basing his statements

upon good sense and reason, Johnson thus defines the duties of a critic and a writer: "It ought to be the first endeavour of a writer to distinguish . . . that which is established because it is right, from that which is right only because it is established . . . that he may not debar himself from the attainment of beauties within his view, by a needless fear of breaking rules which no literary dictator had authority to enact."[1] This large and tolerant attitude toward the rules appeared long before he was to contribute his great critical works and augurs well for his applied criticism. Some rules are indeed fundamental, others merely useful; some depend on reason, others are enacted by despotic antiquity; some are inevitable; others are purely accidental and therefore, like all human institutions, subject to decay.[2]

But it is in his defence of Shakespeare as a free and untrammelled genius that Johnson makes his position most clear. His attitude toward the dramatist was genuinely admiring; not apologetic, as was that of Dryden, who felt it necessary to explain his love for the poet to an unsympathetic age, but a frank recognition that both Corneille and Shakespeare were great, though each in his own way. "Every new genius subverts the rules," he had said; and again, "Of our former poets the greatest dramatist wrote without rules, conducted through life and nature by a genius that rarely misled, and rarely deserted him."[3] There is always "an appeal open from criticism to nature," from rules "merely positive" to common sense and reason. Johnson's courageous break with neo-classicism upon the subject of the Unities was perhaps the most distinct service he paid to the progress of criticism; at the same time, his horror at his own temerity reveals at once his independence of judgment and his constitutional respect for authority.

In the opinion of both men the real test of a work of art is not the application of external rules but the test of time.

1. *R.* 156. 2. *Ibid.* 3. *R.* 125; *Lives*, I, 410.

Upon this point Johnson has directly referred to Boileau: "Boileau justly remarks that the books which have stood the test of time and been admired through all the changes which the mind of man has suffered through the various revolutions of knowledge, and the prevalence of contrary customs, have a better claim to our regard than any modern can boast, because the long continuance of their reputation proves that they are adequate to our faculties, and agreeable to nature." [1] This is paraphrased from the opening lines of *Réflexion* VII: "It is in reality only the approbation of posterity which can establish the true merit of a work. Whatever renown a writer may have attained during his life, whatever praise he may have received, it cannot on this account infallibly be concluded that his works are excellent. False brilliants, the novelty of the style, a turn of phrase after the latest fashion, may have made them desired; but taste changes, and one despises what has been admired." The public, then, after an interval of time may rightly pass judgment upon literary matters. "About things on which the public thinks long it commonly attains to think right," [2] is Johnson's declaration, to be compared with Boileau's, "Le gros des hommes à la longue ne se trompe point sur les ouvrages d'esprit." [3] At the beginning of the *Preface* to Shakespeare, Johnson, following the lead of Horace, assigns a century as the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit.[4] His belief in the ultimate common sense of readers appears in his remarks on Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard:* "by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours." [5]

1. *R.* 92. 2. *Lives*, II, 132. 3. *Réflexion* VII.

4. Est vetus atque probus centum qui perficit annos. *Ep.* II, 1, 39.

5. *Lives*, III, 441. See *R.* 23: "There always lies an appeal from domestick criticism to a higher judicature, and the publick, which is never corrupted, nor often deceived, is to pass the last sentence upon literary claims."

From the foregoing it can be inferred that Johnson's opinion concerning the value of works of antiquity would be very similar to that of Boileau. And this is true, particularly where Boileau in his *Réflexions critiques sur Longin* makes concessions to the "modern" point of view and by his acceptance of the individual judgment as of determining weight in criticism marks the giving-up of absolute models and the breaking-down of the neo-classic reverence for antiquity in and for itself. In *Réflexion* VII, published in 1693, he declares that when writers have been admired by men of discernment for some centuries there can be little doubt of their merit, not merely because they are old but because they have stood the test of changes of taste from one age to another. Johnson at the very beginning of his *Preface* to Shakespeare relieves his mind upon this point. An extended quotation of this most important passage will reveal his own opinion better than in any other way: "Antiquity," he declares, "like every other quality that attracts the notice of mankind, has undoubtedly votaries that reverence it, not from reason, but from prejudice. Some seem to admire indiscriminately whatever has been long preserved, without considering that time has sometimes coöperated with chance; all, perhaps, are more willing to honour past than present excellence; and the mind contemplates genius through the shades of age, as the eye surveys the sun through artificial opacity. The great contention of criticism is to find the faults of the moderns, and the beauties of the ancients. While an author is yet living, we estimate his powers by his worst performance, and when he is dead we rate them by his best.

"To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientifick, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind have long possessed they have often examined

and compared; and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour. . . . Works tentative and experimental must be estimated by their proportion to the general and collective ability of man, as it is discovered in a long succession of endeavours. . . . The poems of Homer we yet know not to transcend the common limits of human intelligence, but by remarking, that nation after nation, and century after century, has been able to do little more than transpose his incidents, new name his characters, and paraphrase his sentiments.

"The reverence due to writings that have long subsisted, arises, therefore, not from any credulous confidence in the superiour wisdom of past ages, or gloomy persuasion of the degeneracy of mankind, but is the consequence of acknowledged and indubitable positions, that what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood."

This position of Johnson's may or may not be narrowly pseudo-classic very largely according to the interpretation and application of the foregoing remarks. Certainly in these he has made no slavish surrender to prevailing dogmas.

In like manner, by applying his reason and his good sense in the name of truth and nature, he takes an independent stand upon the problem of the imitation of ancient mythology and breaks completely with eighteenth-century convention upon this subject. Boileau had defended mythological writing as a species of allegory, interpreting the Greek and Roman divinities as personifications of abstract qualities and taking his place as the chief advocate of this kind of writing.[1] Johnson had often in the *Rambler* employed allegory after the manner of Addison and therefore did not despise the genre if it were employed with care; but he always conducted a vigorous warfare against the whole lifeless imitation of models that

1. *A. P.* III, 165.

makes much of the eighteenth-century verse such depressing reading.

One reflection out of the *Preface* explains how the oldest poets of many nations preserve their reputations, while the following generations of wit, after a short celebrity, sink into oblivion. This fate is due to the necessity writers find of first taking their sentiments and descriptions immediately from knowledge, thereby drawing directly from nature. Their followers copy partly nature and partly them, until the ancient books gain such authority as to stand in place of nature, "and imitation, always deviating a little, becomes at last capricious and casual." This casual imitation, which seems inevitable in these latter days, might, he thought, be admitted without censure; but that other imitation of set models which had laid its heavy hand upon the century he always met with uncompromising hostility. His zeal does in fact lead him to assert that the machinery of the Pagans is no longer interesting to us. "When a Goddess appears in Homer or Virgil, we grow weary; still more so in the Grecian tragedies, as in that kind of composition a nearer approach to nature is intended. . . . It is evident enough that no one who writes now can use the Pagan deities and mythology. The only machinery, therefore, seems that of ministering spirits, the ghosts of the departed, witches, and fairies, though these latter, as the vulgar superstition concerning them . . . is every day wearing out, seem likely to be of little further assistance in the machinery of poetry." [1]

Not only then is the ancient machinery ineffective as a literary device, but its employment tends to deprive the poem in which it appears of any emotional content whatever. Pope's *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*, for example, detains us in the dark and dismal regions of mythology, "where neither hope nor

1. *Bos.* IV, 16–17. See *Lives*, I, 213. "Of the ancient poets every reader feels the mythology tedious and oppressive."

fear, neither joy nor sorrow can be found"; Granville is ever amusing himself with the puerilities of mythology; Tickell's verse is unskilfully compounded of Grecian Deities and Gothick Fairies; Waller pleads in vain the example of ancient poets; and Gray's sins in this respect were such that "criticism disdains to chase a schoolboy to his common-places." "The deities which they [the ancients] introduced so frequently were considered as realities, so far as to be received by the imagination, whatever sober reason might even then determine. But of these images time has tarnished the splendor. A fiction, not only detected but despised, can never afford a solid basis to any position, though sometimes it may furnish a transient allusion, or slight illustration." [1]

So he goes through his poets, condemning their efforts to revive what, he believed, was even in its original use of doubtful value. Rowe's *Ulysses* has found the common fate of mythological stories and is now generally neglected; Gay's *The Fan* is one of those mythological fictions which antiquity delivers ready to the hand. "The attention naturally retires from a new tale of Venus, Diana, and Minerva." Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, on the other hand, is praised for the novelty of its use of supernatural agents, "the heathen deities can no longer gain attention; we should have turned away from a contest between Venus and Diana." And he proceeds so far in his hostility to this sort of writing as to object to "Peace to thy shade" in one of Pope's epitaphs as being too mythological to be admitted into a Christian temple. "The ancient worship has infected almost all our other compositions, and might therefore be contented to spare our epitaphs. Let fiction, at least, cease with life, and let us be serious over the grave." [2]

If Johnson, living a century later, after the imitation of classical mythology had become a positive nuisance in con-

1. *Lives*, III, 226–28; II, 294; II, 311; I, 295; III, 436; I, 295.
2. *Ibid.* II, 68; II, 283; III, 233; III, 261.

temporary verse, shows a certain advance over the ideas of his predecessor upon this subject, he falls definitely below him in his opinions concerning the modern imitation of Latin verse. Johnson's weakness for this kind of imitation has already been noted, and his reference to Boileau's contempt for it mentioned. On this point the Frenchman shows his superiority as a critic to Johnson, who retained a good deal of the pedantic fondness for Latin writing which distinguished the scholar-in-*us* of the sixteenth century. Boileau looked upon such exercises as a perversion of talent upon a *genre faux*, which never could possess any real vitality; Johnson, on the contrary, brought up in the English public school system, where the boys learn to make set exercises of a patchwork of phrases from the classics, inherited the English scholarly tradition and classical training.

Boileau has written a clever *Fragment d'un dialogue contre les modernes qui font des vers latins*, in which he has ridiculed this fashion of writing. Upon the slopes of Parnassus, Horace complains to Apollo that certain French poets have been guilty of imitating the Latin masters. The Muses give information against the offending poets, who are then summoned to appear. They file in, Menagi*us*, Pereri*us*, Sautoli*us*, etc., and are requested by the God of Poetry to versify. One of them gives horns to Jove, and when Apollo, angry at the insult to his father, demands the reason, the poet whimpers, "C'est pour finir le vers." Horace then commences to versify in French, but is at once corrected by one of the poets for his inelegant diction. This gives the Roman poet an opportunity to lash the poetical mob for employing a tongue to which they were not born. Apollo awards as punishment for their *lèse majesté* that they shall read each other's verses. They fall to quarrelling and are finally driven from Parnassus.

Boileau was not, however, opposed to the use of Latin upon appropriate occasions. Johnson's insistence upon the

use of Latin in the composition of Goldsmith's epitaph has already received mention. Boileau has written a *Discours sur le style des inscriptions*, in which, after asserting that inscriptions should be simple, short, and familiar, he observes that the Latin language possesses a simplicity, a nobleness, and an energy not attainable in other tongues, and that inscriptions should at least approach the neatness of the Latin. In his *Lettre à Brossette*, 15 Mai, 1705, he makes a more explicit statement of his views, declaring that the French language on account of its gerundives and auxiliary verbs lacks the admirable conciseness of the Latin ablative absolute and is therefore far less fitted for making inscriptions.[1]

Upon the great problem of decorum, Johnson upon the whole breaks with neo-classical canons, just as he breaks with the pseudo-classical distinction between the genres in his vigorous defence of tragi-comedy.[2] Boileau in both of these respects is much more rigid than Johnson. His instructions to keep each character carefully distinguished from every other, and climates and humours in their accepted categories, were acknowledged rules in France almost down to the nineteenth century.[3] In England, Rymer's extreme dogmas exerted powerful influence over many critical minds, until in 1765 Johnson by means of his observations on Shakespeare led the way to a saner appreciation of the poet. Dennis and Rymer had thought his Romans not sufficiently Roman, and Voltaire had censured his kings as not completely royal. Johnson answers these critics by maintaining that Shakespeare made nature predominate over accident, that he sought the essential rather than the adventitious; that as a poet he overlooked the casual distinctions of country and conditions for the sake of a portrayal of general nature. "His

1. *Oeuvres*, IV, 418–22. Correspondance entre Boileau-Despréaux et Brossette, Paris, 1858, p. 204.
2. *R.* 156; *Works*, V, 112.
3. *A. P.* III, 103, 261–67.

story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men. He knew that Rome, like every other city, had men of all dispositions; and wanting a buffoon, he went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him. He was inclined to shew an usurper and a murderer, not only odious but despicable, he therefore added drunkenness to his other qualities, knowing that kings love wine like other men, and that wine exerts its natural power upon kings. These are the petty cavils of petty minds; a poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery."

In spite of this spirited stand against narrow principles, he himself occasionally lapses into an amusing pseudo-classicism. Henry V prays like a Christian and swears like a heathen; the phrase, "now speak we on our cue," the author learned among players and has imparted to kings; and in *Henry V*, V, 2, 305–402, we have a mean dialogue for princes, "the merriment is very gross, and the sentiments are worthless." [1]

Of the decorum of language, the principle governing propriety of speech upon which not merely the literature but the very structure of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century courtly society was built, we have a fairly detailed examination by both men. Boileau, literary censor of the court of the Grand Monarque, naturally regarded "lowness" as the chief crime against good manners. His famous lines,

> Quoi que vous écriviez, évitez la bassesse;
> Le style le moins noble a pourtant sa noblesse.
> Au mépris du bon sens, le burlesque effronté
> Trompa les yeux d'abord, plut par sa nouveauté:
> On ne vit plus en vers que pointes triviales;
> Le Parnasse parla le langage des halles,[2]

assigning the term "low" to certain words because of disgusting or repellent associations which they call to the mind,

1. *Henry V*, IV, 3, 24; III, 6, 133–34; V, 2, 305–402. 2. *A. P.* I, 79–84.

find their echo in Johnson in rather fuller degree than usual. Boileau's unremitting war upon conceits and Johnson's attack upon the metaphysical poets may at this point be brought into relation to each other. The former's discussion of Homer's diction from the point of view of seventeenth-century France and his defence of *asinus* as a term proper in the Greek language represent the same neo-classical principle in its extreme application and may be compared with Johnson's exceptions to the language of Shakespeare.[1]

At the very commencement of his paper upon low terms in *Macbeth*, Johnson refers directly to the judgments of his predecessor, "It has been observed by Boileau, that 'a mean or common thought expressed in pompous diction, generally pleases more than a new or noble sentiment delivered in low and vulgar language; because the number is greater of those whom custom has enabled to judge of words, than whom study has qualified to examine things.' . . . No word is naturally or intrinsically meaner than another; our opinion therefore of words, depends wholly upon accident and custom."[2] Words become low by particular application, and cause disgust by the revival of gross associations. Words of dignity in one age become inelegant in the next because they are debased by vulgar mouths and can no longer call up pleasing images.

These sentences are sound and reasonable and worthy of the great lexicographer; it is only in the occasional application of this principle that we see how close were the ties which bound him to neo-classicism. His famous objections to Macbeth's use of a term heard but in the stable; of knife, an instrument used by butchers and cooks in the meanest employment and so unfit for a murderer; and of the avengers of guilt peeping through a blanket, are but examples of the

1. *Réflexion* IX; *Preface* and *Notes to Shakespeare*.
2. *R.* 168.

pull which pseudo-classical dogmas sometimes exerted upon him.[1]

Likewise his comment on these lines,

> That small model of the barren earth,
> Which serves as paste and cover to our bones,

"a metaphor, not of the most sublime kind, taken from a pie," has about it just a touch of the ridiculous.

This great critical problem of the fitness of certain words as proper to the diction of poetry is usually dealt with sensibly. In the *Life of Cowley*, Johnson argues that as language is the dress of thought the most heroic ideas lose their magnificence if they are conveyed by low and trivial words or vulgar and inelegant expressions. "He [Cowley] seems not to have known, or not to have considered, that words being arbitrary must owe their power to association, and have the influence, and that only, which custom has given them." [2] Just before condemning Dryden's use of technical terms he presents an elaborate summary of his opinion upon poetic diction. "Every language," he says, "of a learned nation necessarily divides itself into diction scholastick and popular, grave and familiar, elegant and gross; and from a nice distinction of these different parts arises a great part of the beauty of style. But if we except a few minds, the favourites of nature, to whom their own original rectitude was in the place of rules, this delicacy of selection was little known to our authors: our speech lay before them in a heap of confusion, and every man took for every purpose what chance might offer him.

1. *Macbeth*, I, 5, 49–53.

> Come, thick night!
> And *pall* thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen *knife* see not the wound it makes;
> Nor heav'n *peep* through the *blanket* of the dark,
> To cry, Hold! Hold!

2. *Lives*, I, 58–59.

"There was therefore before the time of Dryden no poetical diction: no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestick use and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts. Words too familiar or too remote defeat the purpose of a poet. From those sounds which we hear on small or on coarse occasions, we do not easily receive strong impressions or delightful images; and words to which we are nearly strangers, whenever they occur, draw that attention on themselves which they should transmit to things." [1]

He accordingly ventured to criticize the diction of Shakespeare, sometimes perhaps too narrowly, but conscientiously nevertheless. He recognized that after an age of great literary exuberance, the following age must perform the service of systematizing and codifying poetic laws and of rejecting the excrescences of poetic style. Because Dryden's use of nautical terms would appear strange to the ordinary reader, he condemned them. "It is a general rule in poetry that all appropriated terms of art should be sunk in general expressions, because poetry is to speak an universal language. . . . It had better become Dryden's learning and genius to have laboured science into poetry, and have shewn, by explaining longitude, that verse did not refuse the ideas of philosophy." [2] Surely this is at the opposite pole from the romantic love of exotic diction and the archæological and scientific excursions of Victor Hugo.

Johnson goes further and bars certain subjects as unfit for poetic treatment. Boswell tells us that he spoke slightingly of Dyer's *Fleece*. "The subject, Sir, cannot be poetical. How can a man write poetically of serges and druggets?" [3] The story is told of the reading of Grainger's *Sugar-Cane*, that when the poet came to the line: "Now, Muse, let's sing of rats," the whole company burst into a laugh. Johnson did not like the poem: "What could he make of a sugar-cane?

1. *Lives*, I, 420. 2. *Ibid.* I, 433–34.
3. *Bos.* II, 453. See also *Lives*, III, 346.

One might as well write the 'Parsley-bed, a Poem'; or the 'Cabbage-garden, a Poem' . . . one could say a good deal about cabbages. The poem might begin with the advantages of civilized society over a rude state, exemplified by the Scotch, who had no cabbages till Oliver Cromwell's soldiers introduced them; and one might thus show how the arts are propagated by conquest, as they were by the Roman arms." [1] The use and abuse of this fundamental critical problem is supremely exemplified in eighteenth-century poetry; the infinite weariness produced in the mind of the reader by the poet's horror of anything like lowness, through such circumlocutions as "the whiskered vermin race" (in the *Sugar-Cane* above), makes most of the poetical production of the period so lifeless to the modern reader.

Closely allied to their relation to this problem of decorum, and growing out of it, is what they have to say upon the propriety of representing subjects from sacred history in secular verse. Boileau seems to take his stand against it wholly from artistic reasons.

> Et quel objet enfin à présenter aux yeux,
> Que le diable toujours hurlant contre les cieux;
> Qui de votre héros veut rabaisser la gloire,
> Et souvent avec Dieu balance la victoire,

he declares,[2] prohibiting the interposition of the Almighty because thereby truth and probability would be destroyed. "De la foi d'un chrétien les mystères terribles" [3] are not susceptible of adornment, but not apparently through any very profound reverence for the traditional faith; it is rather because of the impossibility of introducing a "God of lies" [4] upon the scene that he bids the poet refrain. The ancient quarrel between the classical and medieval points of view was still in process of being fought out when Boileau wrote

1. *Bos.* II, 454.
2. *A. P.* III, 205–08.
3. *Ibid.* III, 199.
4. *Ibid.* III, 236.

this. Tasso had not yet ceased to be a subject of contention to the critics.

When we approach the question of what Johnson thought upon this subject, we meet a side of our author's nature an understanding of which is of fundamental importance to us in our study of his opinions. He accepted the Christian mysteries, not as an external system to which men find it most expedient to conform, but as the most real thing in a life which did not otherwise yield many rewards of happiness to the individual. His deep and abiding faith in these mysteries had its source in the fact that through them he found his escape from the flux of this world and an explanation of what in any other way was to him inexplicable confusion. This is true religion, and in this manner the religious souls of all the ages have found their consolation, whatever form their contemplation of Eternal Truth may have taken.

Sacred history, he says in criticizing Cowley's *Davideis*, should be approached with submissiveness and awe. Nakedness and simplicity are the qualities of the sacred narrative, and it demands such humble devotion as suppresses curiosity. "All amplification is frivolous and vain; all addition to that which is already sufficient for the purposes of religion seems not only useless, but in some degree profane."[1] The miracle of creation is above the power of human genius to dignify. God spake the word, and they were made.

In the *Life of Waller* he declares that the essence of poetry is invention, "such invention as, by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights. The topicks of devotion are few, and being few are universally known; . . . they can receive no grace from novelty of sentiment . . . . or of expression. . . . From poetry the reader justly expects, and from good poetry always obtains, the enlargement of his comprehension and elevation of his fancy; but this is rarely to be

1. *Lives*, I, 49–50.

hoped by Christians from metrical devotion. Whatever is great, desirable, or tremendous, is comprised in the name of the Supreme Being. Omnipotence cannot be exalted; Infinity cannot be amplified; Perfection cannot be improved." [1] And he proceeds to explain the simplicity and the beauty of true Christian piety, naming Faith, Thanksgiving, Repentance, and Supplication as the employments of pious meditation, enlarging upon each and showing how poetry but loses its lustre when applying itself to the decoration of something more excellent than itself.

In like manner he finds fault with *Paradise Lost* for its lack of human interest. Truths which have been taught to our infancy, have been companions of solitude and familiar conversation, and are in fact woven into the whole texture of our existence, cannot call up any new emotions or raise any surprise in the mind. Images and ideas from which we shrink in awful reverence or contemplate only in stated hours as counterpoises to our passions rather obstruct the career of fancy than excite it. "Pleasure and terrour are indeed the genuine sources of poetry; but poetical pleasure must be such as human imagination can at least conceive, and poetical terrour such as human strength and fortitude may combat. The good and evil of Eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit; the mind sinks under them in passive helplessness, content with calm belief and humble adoration." [2]

And so, again and again, does he prove his claim to be called a true religious soul, in a strain of strong, simple piety, and it is just because these things were so precious to him that he did not wish to see them adorned or profaned by the hand of man. And yet, contrary to his usual utterances, Johnson was undoubtedly moved by the solemn ritual of the Church. Mrs. Piozzi tells how he would try to repeat the *Dies irae, Dies illa*, never being able to pass the stanza ending *Tantus labor*

1. *Lives*, I, 291–92. 2. *Ibid.* I, 182.

non sit cassus without bursting into a flood of tears. This she used to quote against him when he inveighed against devotional poetry as being cold and feeble and unworthy the subject, which ought to be treated with higher reverence than poets or painters could either excite or bestow.[1]

Both Boileau and Johnson insist upon moral values in art, and upon this point also, as we might surmise, the English moralist lays far greater stress than does the Frenchman. Boileau, like a good classicist, stands firmly with the moralists.[2]

> Que votre âme et vos moeurs, peintes dans vos ouvrages,
> N'offrent jamais de vous que de nobles images.
> Je ne puis estimer ces dangereux auteurs,
> Qui de l'honneur, en vers, infâmes déserteurs,
> Trahissant la vertu sur un papier coupable,
> Aux yeux de leurs lecteurs rendent le vice aimable,

he advises the young poet, and again with emphasis:[3]

> Mais la seule vertu peut souffrir la clarté,
> Le vice, toujours sombre, aime l'obscurité.

This somewhat mild indignation against the allurements of vice proceeds from his conviction that art should serve as well as please humanity.[4]

> Qu'en savantes leçons votre muse fertile
> Partout joigne au plaisant le solide et l'utile.
> Un lecteur sage fuit un vain amusement,
> Et veut mettre à profit son divertissement.

This problem of moral values in art is an old one, and in Johnson's case it should be approached with the same sympathy as in the case of his objection to the employment of the Christian mysteries as subjects for artistic representation. It is necessary to reëmphasize this Christian humanism of his and the genuine piety which induced him to seek means through art to influence human conduct. Never, like Tolstoi,

1. *Misc.* I, 284.
2. *A. P.* IV, 91–96.
3. *Epître* IX, 113, 114.
4. *A. P.* IV, 87–90.

does he deny the place of art in human life, for he had none of the false humanitarianism of these latter days, and seldom is he frigidly didactic in his strictures. Even in his early days when he took his self-imposed task of moral censorship with profound seriousness, his reflections in the periodicals were always sincere, revealing as they do a sombre nature looking upon the tragedy of this life as something to be endured with fortitude and finding relief for the spirit in Christian revelation. It is for this reason, I think, that he finds Christian morality superior to pagan teachings, for we find him saying that the ancient poets, wanting the light of Revelation, were very unskilful teachers of virtue; "their principal characters may be great, but they are not amiable. The reader may rise from their works with a greater degree of active or passive fortitude, and sometimes of prudence; but he will be able to carry away few precepts of justice, and none of mercy." [1]

As he grew older he gradually freed himself from a highly congenial doctrine. The *Lives of the Poets* is much freer from the oppressively didactic point of view than either of the periodicals or the *Preface* to Shakespeare. His complaint that Shakespeare sometimes writes without any moral purpose and often sacrifices virtue to convenience is in reality the judgment of a true humanist upon the great Gothic genius, and need not be too severely censured. But his application of this remark, when in his notes upon *As You Like It* he asserts that the poet has omitted an opportunity for instruction in the person of the usurper at the conclusion of the play, reveals his neo-classical bias. Note again his leaning toward the Tate version of *King Lear*. "He who thinks reasonably must think morally," he observes, rising in the statement of his principles to a place among the humanists; but he sinks again to the level of Rymer and Bossu when he adds that the poet "makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the vir-

1. *Lives*, I, 179.

tuous a disapprobation of the wicked"; though even here, I believe, we must grant him the merit of genuine feeling and a consistent endeavor to aid men to live better. This is borne out by another reflection in the same *Preface*, that it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent of time or place, by which the author seems willing to accept the most insufferable of moral preachments.

As a rule, however, Johnson is fairly reasonable in his demands for moral instruction. "The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing," he declared at the beginning of the *Preface*. His whole emphasis on the moral effect of art arises from the desire that a serious nature has to mediate between the matter of art and the matter of life, and Johnson's position is immensely more deserving of respectful attention than the external "rules" of the neoclassical critics. For example, he asserts that the perusal of Congreve's works would make no man better, bearing down for the moment upon their evident lack of moral standards and forgetting their infinite wit which he has just praised, for "their ultimate effect is to represent pleasure in alliance with vice, and to relax those obligations by which life ought to be regulated." [1]

His comment on a certain type of mind is interesting: "Of the mind that can trade in corruption, and can deliberately pollute itself with ideal wickedness for the sake of spreading the contagion in society, I wish not to conceal or excuse the depravity. — Such degradation of the dignity of genius, such abuse of superlative abilities, cannot be contemplated but with grief and indignation." [2] And it is but natural that he should have given high praise to the efforts of Addison to reform manners. Above all Greek or Roman fame is that of the man who can dissipate the prejudice against virtue as companion for gaiety and good manners.[3]

1. *Lives*, II, 222. 2. *Ibid.* I, 398. 3. *Ibid.* II, 126.

Boswell records an observation of Johnson's which may interpret for us the seriousness with which he regarded art and its reflection upon the life which it interprets: "The contention between pleasure and virtue; a struggle which will always be continued while the present system of nature shall subsist; nor can history or poetry exhibit more than pleasure triumphing over virtue, and virtue subjugating pleasure." [1] And this indicates the vast difference between the point of view of Johnson, which was moral and Christian, and the French classical point of view, which, notwithstanding the oppressive but conventionally moral attitude of the minor critics, remained essentially pagan.

Before passing to the final topic of comparison between the two critics, their opinions of the sublime in poetry, it is essential that we note their attitude upon two important subjects: the necessity of industry and application by the poet and of variety and interest in the composition. Upon the first of these Boileau and Johnson were in thorough agreement, though the emphasis is rather on the side of the former, at least in the expression of his views.[2]

> Hâtez-vous lentement; et, sans perdre courage,
> Vingt fois sur le métier remettez votre ouvrage;
> Polissez-le sans cesse et le repolissez;
> Ajoutez quelquefois, et souvent effacez.

This Horatian sentiment, reflected in his advice, [3]

> Je vous l'ai déjà dit: aimez qu'on vous censure,
> Et, souple à la raison, corrigez sans murmure,

is one of the chief tenets of his literary creed. Polish and repolish, seek an honest and severe critic, and be not afraid of hard labor; these precepts are necessary to literary eminence. Indeed, the fourth canto of the *Art Poétique* is practically made up of these directions to the rising poet.

1. *Bos.* I, 411. 2. *A. P.* I, 171–74. 3. *Ibid.* IV, 59–60.

Johnson is not so explicit in his statements, though there can be little doubt that he would have heartily agreed with these sentiments. Of the *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*, he observes that Dryden spent a fortnight in composing and correcting it, and adds, "But what is this to the patience and diligence of Boileau, whose *Équivoque*, a poem of only three hundred forty-six lines, took from his life eleven months to write it and three years to revise it!" [1] Perhaps his astonishment is the greater at this labor in view of his own methods of composition, long meditation and lightning-like execution. He praised the diligence of Pope, who had improved the benefits of nature by incessant and unwearied diligence, had consulted the living and dead, "and was never content with mediocrity when excellence could be attained." Poetry was to him the business of his life, and he followed it with constancy; "to make verses was his first labour, and to mend them was his last." He was one of the few whose labor was their pleasure; "he was never elevated to negligence, nor wearied to impatience; he never passed a fault unamended by indifference, nor quitted it by despair. He laboured his works first to gain reputation, and afterwards to keep it." [2] Prior, too, owed what was valuable in his work to his diligence and judgment. Consequently, he is one of the most correct of English writers and one of the first who resolutely endeavored at correctness. "He never sacrifices accuracy to haste, nor indulges himself in contemptuous negligence or impatient idleness: . . . his words are nicely selected, and his thoughts fully expanded." [3]

These reflections suggest a doctrine evoked from the superb eighteenth-century complacency which resulted from the conviction that by mere diligence and cultivation of versification one may attain to poetic honors. Pope himself through steady application reached a point beyond which English verse could not go, in the opinion of the century's greatest

1. *Lives*, I, 388. 2. *Ibid.* III, 217–18. 3. *Ibid.* II, 208.

critic; why then should not any man do in like manner? This very curious outgrowth of the practice of poetical imitation, of culling literary flowers and grafting them on native stock, is reflected to a certain degree in Johnson's criticism. Else, why should he have recommended the insertion of the lives of Blackmore, Pomfret, and Yalden? As a rule, Johnson's judgment leads him away from pettiness like this, but we continually meet expressions which have just a suggestion of that peculiar self-satisfaction which was prevalent in almost every kind of activity through the century. Thus, Otway did not much cultivate versification, or replenish his mind with general principles, and Butler's treasures of learning leave the reader in complete astonishment;[1] but usually it is the general tone of criticism upon niceties of versification and proprieties of diction which gives the impression of Johnson's contentment with mere industry.

Yet these statements can easily be controverted by numberless observations almost directly the reverse in intent and meaning. For instance, Prior, just cited as an example of what industry can do, receives his dismissal without any mistake in emphasis. "Prior is never low, nor very often sublime. . . . He has many vigorous but few happy lines; he has every thing by purchase, and nothing by gift; he had no 'nightly visitations' of the Muse, no infusions of sentiment or felicities of fancy."[2] And Pope seems to have thought with Boileau that the practice of writing might be refined till the difficulty should overbalance the advantage.[3] Perhaps the comment upon Blackmore expresses pretty adequately Johnson's real opinion of the value of industry. "Having formed a magnificent design he was careless of particular and subordinate elegances; he studied no niceties of versification; he wanted for no felicities of fancy; . . . nor does it appear that he saw beyond his own performances, or had ever elevated his views to that ideal per-

1. *Lives*, I, 212. 2. *Ibid.* II, 208. 3. *Ibid.* III, 249.

fection which every genius born to excel is condemned always to pursue, and never overtake." [1]

Boileau's immense emphasis upon variety and interest finds a decided reflection in Johnson.[2] "Tediousness," he says, "is the most fatal of all faults; negligences or errors are single and local, but tediousness pervades the whole: other faults are censured and forgotten, but the power of tediousness propagates itself. He that is weary the first hour is more weary the second; as bodies forced into motion, contrary to their tendency, pass more and more slowly through every successive interval of space.

"Unhappily this pernicious failure is that which an author is least able to discover. We are seldom tiresome to ourselves; and the act of composition fills and delights the mind with change of language and succession of images: every couplet when produced is new, and novelty is the great source of pleasure. Perhaps no man ever thought a line superfluous when he first wrote it, or contracted his work till his ebullitions of invention had subsided. And even if he should controul his desire of immediate renown, and keep his work *nine years* unpublished, he will be still the author, and still in danger of deceiving himself; and if he consults his friends, he will probably find men who have more kindness than judgement, or more fear to offend than desire to instruct." [3] He says that *Absalom and Achitophel* was tedious on account of its lack of imagery and description, "and a long poem of mere sentiments easily becomes tedious; . . . the reader, if not relieved by the interposition of something that sooths the fancy, grows weary of admiration, and defers the rest." [4] And he finds a like fault with *Paradise Lost* as one of those books which the reader admires and lays down and forgets to take up again. "None ever

1. *Lives*, II, 253.

2. A good portion of the first canto of the *Art Poétique* is given up to instructions upon this subject. See particularly lines 50–70.

3. *Lives*, II, 206–07.

4. *Ibid.* I, 437.

wished it longer than it is. . . . We read Milton for instruction, retire harassed and overburdened, and look elsewhere for recreation; we desert our master, and seek for companions."[1]

This last quotation brings up again Johnson's opinion of the purpose of art. That he should have found the Puritan theology of *Paradise Lost*, with its central conception of a personal deity, possessing the stern, unyielding nature of his Puritan worshippers, overburdening to his artistic sense, speaks volumes for his reaction upon the world of art. Here a thoroughly serious nature turns away from the edifying and the instructive in a great religious poem because those parts were frigid and pedantic, and responds with true instinct to what is of artistic value. Johnson's humanism went out to the humanism of Milton, but his critical sense was repelled by that which he considered insupportably tedious in the great Christian epic.

All these observations upon tedium rest upon the principle, announced in the *Life of Butler*, that all pleasure consists in variety. Uniformity, even the uniformity of excellence, must tire at last. "We love to expect; and, when expectation is disappointed or gratified, we want to be again expecting. . . . The skilful writer *irritat, mulcet;* makes a due distribution of the still and animated parts. It is for want of this artful intertexture and those necessary changes that the whole of a book may be tedious, though all the parts are praised."[2] It was for this reason that Prior did not discover in his *Solomon* that it wanted that without which all others are of small avail, "the power of engaging attention and alluring curiosity."[3] Likewise, Johnson's condemnation of Thomson's *Liberty*, of Akenside's verse,[4] and of other poems and poets

1. *Lives*, I, 183–84. 2. *Ibid.* I, 212. 3. *Ibid.* II, 206.

4. *Ibid.* III, 289; 417. "Was there," asked Johnson, "ever yet any thing written by mere man that was wished longer by its readers, excepting *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Pilgrim's Progress?*" *Misc.* I, 332.

is based on this same fault of tediousness, which he had taken pains to discuss thus elaborately.

These reflections are sufficient answer to any suggestion that Johnson might have felt an inclination to turn away from art towards the purely didactic. These are in fact so many proofs that he was defending, not repudiating, art, and that he merely insisted, with rather too much emphasis perhaps, that art should have as one of its declared purposes the interpretation of life in the pleasure it affords to men. Perhaps Horace's lines,

> Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,
> Lectorem delectando pariterque monendo,[1]

came to his mind as he penned these words. Certainly the sentiment is as Horatian as any he uttered.

It may be interesting to note the few words he has said expressly upon taste. One sentence shows pretty clearly his opinion. "These apologies," he says of Congreve's dedication of the *Double Dealer*, "are always useless, 'de gustibus non est disputandum'; men may be convinced, but they cannot be pleased, against their will. But though taste is obstinate, it is very variable." [2] "Talking on the subject of taste in the arts," writes Boswell, "he said that difference of taste was, in truth, difference of skill. Swift had a good neat style, another may have a more splendid style; they are both good of their kind." [3]

The last and perhaps most striking point of contact between the two critics lies in their respective attitudes toward the province of the imagination and their recognition of the sublime. By 1765, the year of the publication of his famous *Preface* to Shakespeare, Johnson had somewhat outgrown the contracted point of view of his *Rambler* period; Boileau, in like manner, through the necessity of meeting the attacks of

1. *A. P.* 343–44. 2. *Lives*, II, 217. 3. *Bos.* II, 191.

the "Moderns," under the leadership of Perrault, had reached a point where he was ready to make a good many concessions to the school of taste. It must be remembered, however, that his *Art Poétique* is a definite programme of instructions for the aspiring poet, after the manner of Horace, and has, therefore, confined itself to a specific statement of certain laws without which the poet cannot hope to succeed. Even in this we have hints of his later position.

"C'est là ce qui surprend, frappe, saisit, attache," he asserts of the epic;[1] and again at the beginning of the third canto he affords just a hint of the new element, the appeal to the individual sensibility, which was to play so large a part in the critical quarrels at the end of the century:[2]

> Le secret est d'abord de plaire et de toucher:
> Inventez des ressorts qui puissent m'attacher.

His *Réflexions sur Longin*, however, in which, if he lost something of his characteristic dignity in the heat of his quarrel with the party of the "Moderns" and permitted himself to be drawn into minute discussions of unimportant details, he also made some statements profoundly significant for the future of classical theory, present the fullest explanation of his conception of the province of individual taste. In *Réflexion* X, 1710, he declares that the sublime cannot be demonstrated, "Le sublime n'est pas proprement une chose qui se prouve et se démontre, mais c'est un merveilleux qui saisit, qui frappe, et qui se fait sentir." This *Réflexion* contains the extended discussion of God's words, "Let there be light, and there was light" (Que la lumière se fasse, et la lumière se fit), and a detailed treatment of the sublime and its effect upon the reader. The sublime should be expressed in the simplest words, and the book of Moses, expression of *l'esprit divin*, reaches the sublime through its very simplicity, "dont la douceur majestueuse . . .

1. *A. P.* III, 188. 2. *Ibid.* III, 25–26.

frappe si agréablement l'oreille de tout homme qui a quelque délicatesse et quelque goût." In the following *Réflexion* (XI) he definitely strikes the death-knell of the ancient categorical absolutism of the literary dictator when he asserts that it is impossible to assign causes for what strikes everyone as sublime, but that we find in ourselves the causes of this effect: "et pour le faire ressouvenir que, lorsqu'un endroit d'un discours frappe tout le monde, il ne faut pas chercher des raisons, ou plûtot des vaines subtilités, pour s'empêcher d'en être frappé, mais faire si bien que nous trouvions nous-mêmes les raisons pourquoi il nous frappe."

These expressions of his final attitude toward individual taste do not in the least controvert the standards of judgment which laid the foundations of classical criticism; they rather yield to the growing reaction from a narrow interpretation of rules which tend to eliminate the personal element in criticism. The revolt from the Jesuitical control of religious belief, in time to attain unforeseen development, corresponded pretty well to this breaking-down of the neo-classical hold upon literary taste.

Johnson may have taken many of his ideas upon the subject of the imagination from these *Réflexions*, and, indeed, may have been introduced to the study of Longinus through them. In his famous letter to Lord Chesterfield he quotes the phrase, "Le vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre," which he perhaps found in *Réflexion* II, where Boileau quotes the line as the beginning of Georges Scudéry's *Alaric*, and then criticizes the poem for its high promise and its mean fulfillment.

At any rate, many of Johnson's observations upon the imagination coincide with Boileau's reflections. The sentence from *Rambler* 93, declaring that the beauties of writing, being undemonstrable, are wholly subject to the imagination, refers to some former observer, who may well have been Boileau, as asserting that they do not force their effects upon a mind pre-

occupied by unfavorable sentiments or stubborn partiality. He admits that the idea of beauty is vague and undefined; it is that which pleases us we know not why. So little is it subject to reason that Pascal maintains that we cannot without incongruity and absurdity speak of *geometrical beauty*. "To trace all the sources of that various pleasure we ascribe to the agency of beauty, or to disentangle all the perceptions involved in its idea, would, perhaps, require a very great part of the life of Aristotle or Plato."

In the famous paragraph following his mention of Dryden's translation of Virgil, he has given at some length his opinion of the true way of judging poetry. Not by comparing line by line but by their general effects and ultimate results is the merit of great works to be estimated. Minute criticism of faults and beauties is easy enough, but it is rather delight as a whole which gives works of imagination their great attraction, keeping the mind constantly expecting new delights as the reader proceeds. To quote: "It is not by comparing line with line that the merit of great works is to be estimated, but by their general effects and ultimate result. It is easy to note a weak line, and write one more vigorous in its place; to find a happiness of expression in the original, and transplant it by force into the version: but what is given to the parts may be subducted from the whole, and the reader may be weary though the critick may commend. Works of imagination excel by their allurement and delight; by their power of attracting and detaining the attention. That book is good in vain which the reader throws away. He only is the master who keeps the mind in pleasing captivity; whose pages are perused with eagerness, and in hope of new pleasure are perused again; and whose conclusion is perceived with an eye of sorrow, such as the traveller casts upon departing day." [1]

1. *Lives*, I, 454.

In this Johnson, in contrast to his occasional practice, makes definite rejection of the neo-classical tendency to catalogue faults and beauties and insists upon the immediate reaction of the reader to the total impression the work makes upon him. Here again is a departure from anything like a didactic point of view toward literature, reënforcing what has just been said upon the subject.

I have noted some of the limitations of both Johnson and Boileau in their consideration of the imagination; it has seemed necessary to point out again that neither critic could in any true sense have abandoned himself to the demands of nineteenth-century criticism. And again a distinction must be made regarding the classical and romantic points of view. To the classicist, and Johnson remained a classicist through life, the imagination was the faculty that enabled one to perceive through all particular images and details the underlying principle to which they must be referred. Hence his love of design, that is, of form, his insistence upon general appearances, and his abhorrence of luxuriant detail however beautiful if it bears no organic relation to the whole. To the romanticist the beautiful image or the beautiful moment is sufficient excuse in itself, and he cares not to penetrate further in search of any principle behind them. The classicist's imagination is therefore ethical and central, whereas the romantic imagination may be called eccentric, with no norm by which one may test the truth of his art.

If the foregoing somewhat arbitrary division of human predilections have any value, it is easy to see why classicism, unless checked up by steady reference to imaginative standards, tends to fall into a neo-classical rationalism. For with attention to form and the emphasis on judgment and good sense which are inevitable in any tendency toward generalizations of the results of experiences, a certain dry rationalism is almost

sure to take the place of a truly imaginative approach just as soon as the underlying principles for which the humanist is searching become a set of external rules. And Johnson, child of his age, and endowed with none too poetical a mind, was never wholly free from this neo-classical taint.

Idler 25 gives Johnson's opinion of what in the writing of drama is derived from genius alone and what may be attained by industry. On the one hand, by the gift of nature is the power of distinguishing and discriminating comic characters and of filling tragedy with poetic images; while, on the other hand, "the art of dramatick disposition, the contexture of the scenes, the opposition of characters, the involution of the plot, the expedients of suspension, and the stratagems of surprise," must be learned by practice. In short, the power of characterization and the gift of poetic expression cannot be acquired; but the technique of the artist, the most effective arrangement of his materials, must be gained through diligence and industry. The first, the gifts of nature, corresponds to Boileau's "du ciel l'influence secrète," and the last to his constant insistence upon study and work.

I shall touch upon Johnson's opinions concerning imaginative writing again in the course of this study, and I hope through my various quotations from his works on this subject to make clear the real flexibility of his mind. In Johnson we meet a man of extraordinary contradictions of character. Combined with a strongly conservative nature, which led him to accept the ancient Christian theology in opposition to the Deism which filled the century and to uphold the cherished institutions of Church and State, were a dictatorial temper tending to roar down the contrary opinion, and a liberality of spirit the more astonishing as we think of the traditional view of the man. This last quality will be more clearly brought into view as we come to discuss his relations to contemporary ideas

which in their turn were to exert so powerful an influence upon his own thinking, if only in the way of bringing to the surface his opposition to them.

The present chapter has brought out in full detail just how these two great representatives of the neo-classical spirit in their respective countries remained also the chief exponents of a humanism which could never actually submit to be shackled by the bonds of narrow doctrines or perverted ideas. Their acceptance of standards; their preoccupation with the rules only as a kind of negative check upon the writer, finding in time the real test of literary merit; their selective and discriminating judgment of ancient writers; their life-long warfare upon pseudo-classical imitation of antiquity; their sensible views upon the subject of decorum and poetic diction; their emphasis upon judgment and learning as primary elements in the formation of a just taste; finally, their recognition of the sublime and the relation of the imagination to the other faculties of the mind; all of these principles, judgments, and opinions make up in varying degrees the equipment of the genuine humanist. It is true that both Boileau and Johnson frequently lapsed into pseudo-classical pedantry and seemed to belie their high position among the humanists whose utterances have something of truth for every generation (else why should they to-day be recognized by the not too penetrating scholar as the perfect examples of the pseudo-classical critic at his worst?), but we should remember that contemporaneousness, the natural failure to realize fully the faults of an epoch which they looked upon as the legitimate heir of the humanistic tradition, and perhaps an unconscious antagonism to the newer forces which were to shatter the ancient order, how completely they could scarcely have foreseen, proved to be large factors in shaping their opinions. Care must be taken not to claim too much for Johnson, for he was truly a man of

his period who had assimilated unto himself the very life and spirit of his age; and yet in a sense he rose above his age into the fellowship of the great humanists of all the ages, so that not many thinkers who have lived since he died wear so well for succeeding generations or can offer so rich a storehouse of critical wisdom as he. And so it is as the humanist trying to shake off the fetters of his environment that we shall study him in the following pages.

CHAPTER V

Johnson's Relations to Neo-Classicism

A GOOD portion of the preceding chapters has incidentally explained Johnson's critical principles as they were drawn from his reading and his interest in the critical writing of the past. What he had to say as to truth and nature and reason, his opinions upon the question of antiquity and the imitation of the ancients, and his recognition of the claims of the imagination have received fairly detailed treatment. As I have already pointed out, his criticisms theoretically rested upon truth and nature, which were to be determined through the application of the critic's good sense guided by a constant reference to the great body of classical criticism. It now remains to bring into proper relation his observations upon the various neo-classical doctrines and to determine from them to what extent the dogmas of a narrow school of writing came to be accepted as his own.

The early eighteenth century, dominated as it was by the now thoroughly formulated neo-classical doctrines, was distinctly an age of prose. The rules had, by the beginning of the period, so impressed themselves on current thought that men grew satisfied with a few stock phrases and a few stock ideas as a substitute for a genuine expression of real experience. The sense of an absolute and unchanging literary perfection, stated and expounded long ago by Aristotle and his interpreters, weighed upon their spirits and bound them to certain well-established forms of writing. The pernicious doctrine of imitation and the belief that the literary genres had been forever fixed made apparent the futility of seeking anything new in

expression and kept the same ideas and the same standards secure in their power over most of the writing of the day. The supreme prose virtues of clearness and precision, of measure and restraint, became also the qualities which men valued in their verse. Taste, by which was meant conformity to conventional models, and judgment and learning became the literary ideals of an age satisfied of the soundness of these ideals, and constantly looking askance at any explosion of enthusiasm or the exercise of what we now recognize as the imagination, tending indeed to identify the imagination with these qualities.

Because of the exaggerated importance attached to these qualities of the head over those flowing from the heart, a dry rationalism marked a large portion of the critical writing of the time. The passion for correctness obscured the larger virtues of expression, and Nature, in Pope's words, became methodized within the narrow bounds of neo-classic art. A new kind of wit, quite different from the splendid imaginative meaning which the Elizabethans had bestowed upon the word, made propriety of expression the chief literary quality. A frigid imitation of set types had exalted the conventions, originally formulated for the guidance of the young writer, as the sole aim of effort. Translations of the Classics were numerous, Pope's monumental rendering of Homer pointing the way. This poem, in finish of execution, number of memorable lines, and parade of all the resources of the neo-classic poetical treasury, remains perhaps the culmination of the poetry of the period. So rich was it in the technical qualities of the versifier's art that beyond it the poets of the day could not well go.[1] Through the exaltation of this poetical medium came the contempt for blank verse, relic of an earlier day, before English

1. See the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, X (1913), 147–48, for an interesting conjecture that almost all the eighteenth-century blank verse was half-conscious burlesque.

poetry had come under the authority of the only true rules for writing. The very lack of flexibility which this form of verse reveals was one reason for the narrow round of subjects for imitation and, always excepting personal satire, the want of any genuine feeling in the general literary output. It was a complacent and a blasé age of literature, and before the end, except as men turned to new ways of thought and expression, it was to become bankrupt of any real worth.

Johnson, undertaking to be the spokesman of this period during the days of its gradual decline, naturally conformed in a great many respects to its aims and its ideals. I have already made clear how in many ways he rose above contemporary modes of thought, and in this chapter I wish to show that his chief service to criticism consisted in a life-long hostility to the central neo-classical dogma — that of imitation. But, whether neo-classical or not, Johnson ever remained a staunch upholder of classical tradition, and all his critical writing tended to become an exposition of his own ideals of humanism and just a suggestion of a defense of the older order against the coming revolution.

By the middle of the century the very rigid neo-classicism of the school of Rymer was falling into disrepute. Pursued by the satirical onslaughts of Swift and Pope, the great number of pretenders to criticism were beginning to come under the ban of sound judgment.[1] Johnson, following the lead of Addison and Swift, has, in various places in the *Rambler*, developed in his own peculiar fashion an art of ridicule against these pedants of the art of criticism. *Rambler 3* is a conventional allegory on criticism, after the manner of Addison, in which Criticism, eldest daughter of Labour and Truth, employing the steady light of the torch of truth, settled claims and brought justice to bear in her decisions. After she withdrew from the scene,

1. See the *Digression upon Critics* in the *Tale of a Tub* for a fierce satire upon this class of critics.

Prejudices and False Tastes, associates of Fraud and Mischief, usurped her position.[1] When she broke her sceptre the pieces were caught by Flattery, and Malevolence was supplied by the Furies with a torch; Criticism, however, continues to shed her influence upon select minds.[2] Elsewhere he objects to the microscope of criticism, to the minute discovery of faults and elegances. To the mind of the microscopic critic the smallest deviation from propriety, or the repetition of a particle, is sufficient to condemn a whole work. While these never discern the general spirit of a performance, others criticize with a telescope, finding esoteric connections, remote allusions, and artful allegories in all they read. Evidently the dilettante interpreter of literature flourished long before the popularization of literary study which we think characteristic of our own day.

His best expression of this point of view occurs in the characterization of Dick Minim the Critic.[3] He whom nature has made weak, and idleness keeps ignorant, may yet support his vanity by the name of critic. No genius was ever blasted by the breath of criticism, and the practice of this art, being harmless, but feeds a critic's malignity. Dick Minim, after an apprenticeship to a brewer, resolved to be a man of wit and humor. With this purpose in view, he frequented the company of the lower players, and, as he rose in the world, the coffee-houses, where he picked up odds and ends about language and sentiments, and unities and catastrophes, until he had acquired a sufficient stock of critical paraphernalia to speak for himself. He could then say that the business of art was to copy nature, that genius decays as judgment increases, that the great art is the art of blotting, and that, according to the rule

1. See *Spectator*, 63. "An allegorical vision of the encounter of True and False Wit, and the discomfiture of the latter." See *R.* 22 for "An allegory on wit and learning, being the perennial contest between novelty and antiquity." Both had prejudices; they married and had as offspring the arts and sciences.

2. *R.* 176.

3. *Idler*, 60–61.

of Horace, every piece should be kept nine years. He considered Shakespeare to have wanted correctness, and that Jonson did not sufficiently keep his eyes on nature; he blamed the stanzas of Spenser; he held Waller and Denham the reformers of the English tongue; he condemned rhyming tragedies; thought Congreve wrote with more art than nature; and considered the versification of Rowe too melodious for the stage. He paid Addison no great deference as a critic and was inclined to degrade Pope to the position of a mere versifier. He now headed a party in the pit and had his own circle in the coffee-house. At rehearsals he made many valuable suggestions. He loved to discover hidden beauties and found many subtle echoes of the sound to the sense in *Hudibras*. He expressed admiration for foreign academies and proposed to establish one in London. He praised the noble simplicity of the ancients and compared it with the false elegance of contemporary poets. He fulminated against the monkish barbarity of rhyme, and loved Milton, who never wearied him. To the aspiring youth he never failed to give sound advice, bidding him study a poet's beauties and avoid his faults, be diligent and never let the imagination hurry him beyond the bounds of nature, but rather watch for the moment when his thoughts are expanded and his genius exalted. The boy retires, and Minim feasts on his own beneficence.

Such is Johnson's witty characterization of the little critic. In this portraiture he did not spare some of his own pet hobbies and seemed to realize how easily the stock phrases of neoclassical criticism are transformed into mere cant terms if employed without insight and reason. These papers rise much superior to most of his somewhat elephantine attempts at satire.

That he himself was not averse to what seems to us the cut and dried method of applying Aristotelian rules appears in more than one instance, notably his criticisms of *Samson*

Agonistes[1] and *Paradise Lost.* He decides that the former, according to the indispensable laws of Aristotelian criticism, has a beginning beautiful and proper, and a conclusion just and adequate, but that it wants a middle, for nothing from the first act to the last either hastens or delays Samson's death. He also finds some anachronisms and unsuitableness of the sentiments to the general character of the poem, such as pointed and epigrammatic expressions in an atmosphere of seriousness and solemnity. Then he generously allows it the beauties with which it abounds. He defends his method and attitude by observing, "The learned world has always admitted the usefulness of critical disquisitions, yet he that attempts to show, however modestly, the failures of a celebrated writer, shall surely irritate his admirers, and incur the imputation of envy, captiousness, and malignity." And he concludes by asserting that such are the faults and such the beauties of *Samson Agonistes*, which he had shown with no other purpose than to advance the knowledge of true criticism. "The everlasting verdure of Milton's laurels has nothing to fear from the blasts of malignity; nor can my attempt produce any other effect, than to strengthen their shoots by lopping their luxuriance."

Had this criticism been couched in any other terms, it might pass as an expression of individual opinion deserving of respectful attention. What Johnson failed to see is the blind Milton behind the poem giving utterance in his last days to his faith in God and trying to express his heroic endurance of his fate at the triumph of his enemies. But Johnson wilfully refused to enter into sympathetic contact with his author. Sometimes objective criticism has its limitations.

By a like reference to Aristotelian laws he gives unstinted praise to *Paradise Lost.*[2] The substance of narrative is truth, which, like necessity, is superior to rule. The fable is to convey the moral, and must excite curiosity and surprise expectation.

1. *R.* 139–40. 2. *Lives*, I, 174–76.

The great event which an epic requires is here the fate of worlds. The machinery of angels and devils is necessary, for by no other means could the action have been accomplished. As Aristotle requires, it has a beginning, middle, and end, without any funeral games or descriptions of a shield to disturb the attention. The short digressions are too beautiful to be wished away. The sentiments are unexceptionably just, and the characters consistent. "The questions whether the action of the poem be strictly *one*, whether the poem can be properly termed *heroick*, and who is the hero, are raised by such readers as draw their principles of judgement rather from books than from reason."

Johnson here deliberately adopts the recognized method of criticizing an epic poem, partly because Addison had done so before him, and partly because he knew of no better way of approaching such a work. It will be readily admitted that he has in this succeeded better than any critic before him.

Johnson, indeed, in his whole approach to the problem of literary expression did not easily depart very far from the road which his own time had blazed for him. Whatever I have already said and what I shall later say concerning his recognition of the claims of the imagination need to be qualified by an understanding of the limitations of the eighteenth-century mind. A critic possessing such a mind might admit the possibility of other forms of literature than those to which he was most used; but he would feel likewise that the ages of spontaneous imaginative production had passed, yielding to others in which qualities just as worthy of support had assumed their place. Johnson has made a number of observations suggestive of this point of view.

For example, his constant insistence on study and observation as an indispensable aid to nature, true classical doctrine as it is, gains significance when we discover that these remarks are made in connection with his observations on such poets as

Butler and Roscommon.[1] "Imagination is useless without knowledge:" he declares with emphasis, "nature gives in vain the power of combination, unless study and observation supply materials to be combined." Apropos of the latter poet he makes this noteworthy statement: "The observation, that his imagination would probably have been more fruitful and spritely if his judgement had been less severe, may be answered . . . by a contrary supposition, that his judgement would probably have been less severe if his imagination had been more fruitful. It is ridiculous to oppose judgement to imagination; for it does not appear that men have necessarily less of one as they have more of the other." This is sound doctrine, and should become part of the discipline of any aspirant to poetical honors; it is only as we discover to whom our critic grants the gift of imagination that we learn how defective his understanding of the term must at times have been. Johnson's principles were nearly always worthy: their application too often revealed his bias toward the pseudo-classical way of thinking. According to Pope's chief critic, the poetical master of the century had genius, "a mind active, ambitious, and adventurous, always investigating, always aspiring; . . . in its highest flights still wishing to be higher; always imagining something greater than it knows, always endeavouring more than it can do." [2] This is excellent phrasing, applicable to the most sublime of imaginative writers, as, according to Johnson, it was true of Pope. This poet possessed all the qualities necessary to a writer, including Invention, Imagination, Judgement, and Colours of Language. Imagination is here defined as that "which strongly impresses on the writer's mind and enables him to convey to the reader the various forms of nature, incidents of life, and energies of passion, as in *Eloïsa*, *Windsor Forest*, and the *Ethick Epistles*." [3] Invention arouses new trains of thought and new scenes of imagery; Judgement is the selective and discriminating power; Colors of Language,

1. *Lives*, I, 212; I, 235. 2. *Ibid.* III, 217. 3. *Ibid.* III, 247.

finally, offer every grace of elegant expression, as in his accommodation of his diction to the wonderful multiplicity of Homer's sentiments and descriptions.

To the neo-classical poet, then, is granted the complete equipment of a poet as the critic rationalizes him into Parnassus. Johnson's great virtues and gravest critical faults lay in the rational habit of mind which was his by nature and by intimate association with the Augustan spirit. He lacked, indeed, the poetic sensibility for the appreciation of a poem like *Lycidas*, and his application of rationalizing methods to such works has produced some of his chief critical blunders. But, grant him the privilege of strictly applying his reason to the criticism of poetry, and his great common sense very often produces excellent results. In his remarks upon the *Essay on Criticism* he declares that, as the end of method is perspicuity, that series is regular which avoids obscurity, "and where there is no obscurity it will not be difficult to discover method." Dryden loved to tread upon the brink of meaning, "to approach the precipice of absurdity, and hover over the abyss of unideal vacancy." Dryden in fact has seldom ten lines together without something of which the reader is ashamed, a reflection which has a ring strangely like Dryden's own observation on the language of Shakespeare. He praises Pope for his handling of the supernatural machinery of the *Rape of the Lock* because the author has presented a race of aërial people, never heard of before, in so clear and easy a manner that the reader accepts them at once, mingles with his new acquaintance, adopts their interests, "loves a sylph and detests a gnome." [1]

Thomson's style wanted method, but the critic was so far delighted with his descriptions of natural scenery as to admit that the poet has been able to lay before us the whole magnificence of nature and by his own enthusiasm causes the reader's thoughts to kindle and expand with his sentiments.[2] Thomson

1. *Lives*, III, 234. 2. *Ibid.* III, 299.

has assisted the reader "to recollect and to combine, to arrange his discoveries, and to amplify the sphere of his contemplation." [1] This indicates the extent to which Johnson would give his approval of pure natural description. He had said that one of the sources of poetical delight was description, or the power of presenting pictures to the mind,[2] but his conception of this power of presenting pictures was of the order of the descriptive epithet, or the elaborate image which illustrates or enforces an idea. Here speaks the true classicist, brought up on his Virgil and his Homer, and as far away as possible from the romantic weakness for pure description, as when he declares that Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* lacked these descriptive touches, affording more sentiment than description and not so much impressing scenes on the fancy as deducing consequences and making comparisons. His observation in the criticism of *Windsor Forest*,[3] on the lack of suspense in most descriptive poems, on account of the necessity of exhibiting scenes successively which are all subsisting at the same time, and consequently are shown in an order purely arbitrary, seems to relate itself directly to Lessing's final treatment of description in the pages of his *Laocoön*, and like him to find its basis in the principles of classic art.

His tendency to rationalize imagery is thoroughly neo-classical in its origin. Sometimes when applied to neo-classical poets such as Waller, Dryden, and Pope, who consciously practised these principles, it is productive of good results. For example, he observes that Addison as a poet thinks justly but thinks faintly; he does not take sufficient care of his imagery. "To *bridle* a *goddess* is no very delicate idea; but why must she be *bridled?* because she *longs to launch;* an act which was never hindered by a *bridle:* and whither will she *launch?* into a *nobler strain*. She is in the first line a *horse*, in the second a *boat;* and the care of the poet is to keep his *horse* or his *boat*

1. *Lives*, III, 299. 2. *Ibid.* I, 51. 3. *Ibid.* III, 225.

from *singing*." [1] Many other examples of this special habit of reducing poetical imagery to its lowest terms could be cited if it were necessary, the best examples of extreme application being the destructive analysis of many of Shakespeare's most splendid images and of the odes of Gray.

Pope, the great exemplar of correctness, receives his due meed of praise. The famous simile of the Alps in the *Essay on Criticism* is called the best that English poetry can show, a remark which clearly and definitely reveals the critic's sense of literary values. A perfect simile, he says, both illustrates and ennobles the subject; placing it in a clearer view and displaying it with greater dignity; but either of these qualities may be sufficient. In didactic poetry, the purpose of which is instruction, a simile may properly only illustrate; in heroic poetry it may merely ennoble. To be complete, it must exhibit a pleasing image, for a simile is said to be a short episode. The simile of the Alps does all these things; it makes the foregoing position better understood, and enables it to take hold on the attention; "it assists the apprehension, and elevates the fancy." [2] Thus carefully did he define the terms of rhetoric and apply them to the most correct of English poets; thus, too, did he infer that the merit of correctness and elegance is the most essential to a poet's success. That he did not lay all his stress on mere form could be proved true by many quotations. In *Idler* 36 he declares that inasmuch as every man speaks and writes to be understood, it can seldom happen but he who understands himself might convey his ideas to another

1. *Lives*, II, 128. See also I, 288; II, 129.

2. *Ibid.* III, 229–30. See also II, 129–30. "A poetical simile is the discovery of likeness between two actions in their general nature dissimilar, or of causes terminating by different operations in some resemblance of effect. But the mention of another like consequence from a like cause, or of a like performance by a like agency, is not a simile, but an exemplification. . . . A simile may be compared to lines converging at a point and is more excellent as the lines approach from greater distance: an exemplification may be considered as two parallel lines which run on together without approximation, never far separated, and never joined."

if he were content not to be admired; as soon as he begins to contrive how his sentiments may be received, not with most ease to the reader, but with most advantage to himself, he "transfers his consideration from words to sounds, from sentences to periods, and as he grows more elegant becomes less intelligible." These sound and wholesome observations, coming as a kind of summary of the ideals and aims of an age of prose and reason, might well have been pondered by other ages of literature, in which the imagination was less under the guidance of clear common sense.

Occasionally, it is true, he becomes as frigidly pseudo-classical in his phrasing as the most conventional of eighteenth-century critics. Thus the precepts of Sheffield's *Essay on Poetry* are judicious, but after all the emendations there are many weak lines and some strange appearances of negligence.[1] Savage is liberally praised, rather out of due proportion. His descriptions are "striking," his images "animated," his fictions "justly imagined," and his allegories "artfully pursued." Moreover, his diction is "elevated" and his "numbers sonorous and majestick," though the one is sometimes forced and the other sometimes sluggish and encumbered.[2] Granville's *Essay on Unnatural Flights in Poetry* was "elegant and judicious"; the precepts were just and the cautions proper; since it was a didactic poem, the novelty consisted in the ornaments and illustrations. These precepts were accompanied by agreeable and instructive notes![3] Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, so difficult of perusal to-day, was "an example of great felicity of genius and uncommon amplitude of acquisi-

1. *Lives*, II, 176.

2. *Ibid.* II, 433. See II, 407. "The beauty of this peculiar combination of images is so masterly, that it is sufficient to set this poem [on the Queen's Birthday] above censure; and therefore it is not necessary to mention many other delicate touches which may be found in it, and which would deservedly be admired in any other performance."

3. *Ibid.* II, 295.

tions, of a young mind stored with images, and much exercised in combining and comparing them." But the luxuriance of dress and the fantastic adornment almost prevent the reader from perceiving the sense at all. Delighted and amazed by the very superfluity of expression, he comes out of the flowery labyrinth as he went in. He marked little and laid hold on nothing.[1] *Grongar Hill*, though not very accurately written, was the happiest of Dyer's productions, and because the scenes displayed are so pleasing, the images so welcome to the mind, and the reflections so consonant to the general experience of mankind, when once read it will be read again.[2]

Examples like these might be multiplied to show the kind of poetry Johnson considered worthy of criticism. The degree of justice shown by these remarks does not concern us here, but rather the point of view of the critic with reference to the poetry of his own century. Polish and elegance and propriety of figures of speech were to his mind as essential literary qualities as the loftiness of Milton or Shakespeare's marvellous insight into the human heart. That he usually distinguished between true clearness and perspicuity and threadbare patchwork may be seen from one or two further examples. Of the poems of Dr. John Ogilvie, he once said in conversation that there was in them what was imagination, but was no more imagination in him than sound was sound in the echo. "We have long ago seen *white-robed innocence*, and *flower-bespangled meads*." [3] Regarding Cowley's *Mistress* he says, "Every stanza is crouded with darts and flames, with wounds and death, with mingled souls, and with broken hearts." [4] Against the "cumbrous splendour" of Gray, however, he waxed the warmest. Gray thought his language was more poetical as it was more remote from common life, and he consequently stretched the diction of his odes beyond the limits of common

1. *Lives*, III, 417.
2. *Ibid.* III, 345.
3. *Bos.* I, 421.
4. *Lives*, I, 40.

apprehension. Such expressions as "hallowed fountain" and "solemn sound" and "tyrant power" and "coward vice," though once the fashion in the time of Dante and Petrarch, had long since lost all force in English poetry. "Idalia's velvet-green" had in his opinion something of cant. "An epithet or metaphor drawn from Nature ennobles Art; an epithet or metaphor drawn from Art degrades Nature." [1] This harshness toward the new popular favorite has brought down upon him the scorn of critics of each generation since he wrote his comment.

Johnson attacked this kind of straining after novelty of effect chiefly in his brilliant dissertation upon the metaphysical poets. The fault of writers of the metaphysical race is that of "pursuing their thoughts to their last ramifications, by which they lose the grandeur of generality, for of the greatest things the parts are little; what is little can be but pretty, and by claiming dignity becomes ridiculous." [2] So, now and then genius may produce a lucky trifle, as the *Dove* of Anacreon and the *Sparrow* of Catullus, who owe nothing to the subject for their power of pleasing. But compositions merely pretty, like all pretty things, are soon discarded for something useful, being valued only as they foretell truths. For pretty things are but the playthings of fashion and the amusement of a day.

From novelty to wit is but a step, and Johnson's conception of the meaning of this term will make clear much concerning his position among the critics of his time. He follows the lead of Dryden and Addison in attempting to attach a special meaning to the word. He was aware of the Elizabethan definition, for in his *Life of Cowley* [3] he declares that Wit, which had formerly been used for Intellection, in contradistinction to Will, took on the meaning, whatever that might be, which it now bears. He also knew Dryden's "a propriety of thoughts

1. *Lives*, III, 434–37. 2. *Ibid.* I, 45. 3. *Ibid.* I, 36.

and words elegantly adapted to the subject," and he was of course acquainted with Addison's papers on True and False Wit in the *Spectator*. He quotes Pope's "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed," and denies that in this sense the metaphysical poets were wits. But "Pope's account of wit is undoubtedly erroneous; he depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language." [1] Wit, by a nobler and more adequate conception, is a kind of ideal combination of the natural and the new, which is at once acknowledged to be just; and induces him who had never found it to wonder how he had missed it.[2] "Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors:* a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." [2] Wit is then a discovery of the like in the apparently unlike and the reconcilement of the dissimilar in nature by the power of association.[3]

Of this kind of wit the metaphysical poets have more than enough. But here as ever he brings the test of nature to bear upon them; "real mirth must be always natural, and nature is uniform. Men have been wise in very different modes, but they have always laughed the same way." [4] Wit, indeed, like all things subject to the choice of man, has its changes and fashions, and at times takes different forms; but that wit which is to survive such changes must have its base in nature. Hence, his judgment of *Tristram Shandy*, "Nothing odd will

1. *Lives*, I, 19. 2. *Ibid.* I, 19–20.

3. In his *Dictionary* he defines wit as "sentiments produced by quickness of fancy."

> True wit is Nature to advantage dress'd;
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.

"That, Sir," cried Dr. Johnson, "is a definition both false and foolish. Let wit be dressed how it will, it will equally be wit, and neither the more nor the less for any advantage dress can give it." Mme. D'Arblay's *Diary*, II, 108.

4. *Lives*, I, 140.

do long."[1] It appears, from these remarks, that Johnson tended to dignify the word wit and to make it dependent on the faculty that strikes out new images and invents new situations, but always with its base resting upon nature and upon truth; truth, that is, which is revealed through normal human experience. The extraordinary and the extravagant, essential qualities in modern American humor, being mere novelty divorced from nature, he would doubtless have considered as false wit.

For the same reason he broke with the central neo-classical doctrine of imitation. Neo-classicism in formulating its various dogmas — imitation, decorum, verisimilitude, nature — but seized on the great truths underlying the humanistic conception of life, transformed them into external dogmas, and fixed the manner in which they should be observed. To the classicist, imitation meant more than a blind adherence to certain established literary models; it was in fact the observance in art of the laws that govern normal human action, the imitation of a reality higher than we ordinarily know but representative of us in our more universal aspects. Decorum, too, in the judgment of Aristotle, meant something far different from mere external elegance or conformity to established modes; for Aristotle believed, what every true humanist believes, that man, if he would make himself more humane, must impose certain checks upon his ordinary self, with the end in view of conforming to the requirements of an ideal of all-round perfection. Johnson, it may be admitted, did not always rise above the restrictions his age had imposed upon him;

1. *Bos.* II, 449. See his criticism of the lines (*Lives*, III, 96, n. 4):

> There are whom heaven has bless'd with store of wit,
> Yet want as much again to manage it;
> For wit and judgement ever are at strife.
>
> *Essay on Criticism*, 80–82.

"It is apparent that wit has two meanings, and that what is wanted, though called wit, is truly judgement."

but, in justice to his real worth as a thinker, it needs to be shown how very far he was able to rise above contemporary literary fashions and express himself in terms not contingent on a restricting environment. This fact has frequently been emphasized in our discussion of his position in the world of letters, but it cannot be done too often if we would make clear this most vital and necessary side of his intellectual self.

It will be necessary at the beginning to admit his own decided weakness for modern Latin poetry; but aside from this notable inconsistency of doctrine, it may be said that he set himself firmly against the conventional imitation of models. On the ground that the more imitative a work becomes, the further it gets from that nature which should be the object of all imitation, he protested against the abuse of this practice, of which his country had been supremely guilty. Imitation of models, if rationally practised, was indeed proper enough, though he makes himself clear on this point. "What is borrowed is not to be enjoyed as our own, and it is the business of critical justice to give every bird of the Muses his proper feather." [1] Two numbers of the *Rambler* give his opinion of literary plagiarism. In *Rambler* 121 he asserts that he who adopts the sentiments of an author wiser than himself is not to be blamed when he attempts to deceive. The greater part of students are not born with abilities to construct systems or advance knowledge. The wars of Troy and the travels of Ulysses furnished succeeding poets with poetic material. Virgil combines the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and not always happily. Dido in the shades turns away from Aeneas, as did Ajax from Ulysses in silent disdain, when it would have been more natural for her to break out into reproaches and denunciations. Virgil had his imagination too full of Ajax.

1. *Lives*, III, 256. Of Pope he says: "That he gleaned from authors, obscure as well as eminent, what he thought brilliant or useful, and preserved it all in a regular Collection is not unlikely."

Rambler 143 pleads for certain kinds of plagiarism. The world has a common stock of images, a settled mode of arrangement, and a beaten track of transition. All definitions of the same things are really the same. Conceits can and ought to be discovered but not every imitation should be stigmatized. Borrowed sentiments may display much judgment. He illustrates his position by parallels from Virgil and Horace, from Cicero and Ovid, from Cicero and Horace, from Waller and Grotius, and from Prior and Plato. Judicious borrowing may almost compensate for invention; and an inferior genius may, without any imputation of servility, pursue the path of the ancients, provided he declines to tread in their footsteps.

While he does not refuse credit to this kind of well-considered borrowing, he turns rather to the imitation of natural objects, preferably of common and domestic life. He praises the *Rape of the Lock* because an event below the common incidents of common life has been taken and the familiar made new. The whole detail of a female-day, seen so often as to be no longer regarded, has been so decorated that, though nothing is disguised, we are at once struck with objects from which we have a thousand times turned fastidiously away.[1] He prefers Dryden's *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day* to Pope's, for a like reason; history is more striking than fable; Dryden's are the passions of real life, Pope's are those of an imaginary existence. "Pope is read with calm acquiescence, Dryden with turbulent delight; Pope hangs upon the ear, and Dryden finds the passes of the mind."[2] Dryden is further celebrated for "those penetrating remarks on human nature, for which he seems to have been peculiarly formed."[3] Congreve's early pieces, being the imitation of common life and daily incidents, set one wondering how a knowledge of many characters and an exact observation of the passing world could have been obtained by a boy.[4] But

1. *Lives*, III, 234.
2. *Ibid.* III, 227.
3. *Ibid.* I, 429.
4. *Ibid.* II, 216.

his *Mourning Bride* rather amuses us with noise and perplexes us with stratagem than entertains us with any true delineation of natural character.[1] Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* pleases, as the story is domestic and easily assimilated to common life; *Jane Shore*, likewise, lays hold upon the heart because of the domestic scenes and private distress.[2]

This wholly unromantic attitude toward literature and the marked preference for realism in his tastes reveal the direction in which Johnson inclined. Neither the wretched imitations of imitations with which the century was cursed, nor the sentimental revival of medieval romances and ballads during the third quarter of the century ever gained his approval. Both as moralist and as critic, he turned to the portrayal of common and domestic life. Thus, the *Odyssey* made an especial appeal to him on account of its domestic scenes,[3] and Euripides was a favorite for the same reason; and finally Shakespeare's plays and Richardson's novels were great for their portrayal of the human heart.

The kind of imitation he set himself deliberately to combat was the lifeless imitation of certain literary forms which had long lost their freshness, becoming merely a conventional exercise which the minor poets had worked over to the point of weariness to reader and critic. The pastoral, more particularly the Spenserian form of the pastoral, was the principal object of imitation by the versifiers of the day. The imitator, if there must be an imitator, treads a beaten path, and little that is original can be expected from him.

The two famous papers on the pastoral, *Rambler* 36 and 37, take up the subject in detail. A brief summary and paraphrase of them will make his position clear. The pastoral is generally pleasing, because it entertains the mind with scenes familiar to every imagination; where joy and innocence and plenty exist, "where every gale whispers pleasure and every shade prom-

1. *Lives*, II, 219. 2. *Ibid.* II, 67, 69. 3. *Bos.* IV, 219; 311.

ises repose." We are delighted with rural pictures, because we know the original at an age when our curiosity can be very little awakened by descriptions of courts that we never beheld, or representations of passions that we never felt. "The images of true pastoral have always the power of exciting delight; because the works of nature, from which they are drawn, have always the same order and beauty, and continue to force themselves on our thoughts, being at once obvious to the most careless regard, and more than adequate to the strongest reason, and severest contemplation." Hence numbers without number have transmitted the same images in the same combination from one to another, till no man after perusing thousands of these performances finds his knowledge enlarged with a single view of nature not produced before, or his imagination amused with any new application of these views to moral purposes. The range of pastoral is narrow, since nature in its general effects is uniform and incapable of much variety of description. And in the hands of men who do not know her, she has become either conventionalized or distorted. Not only the images of rural life, but the occasions upon which they can be properly produced, are few and general. The complexity of the busy world is lacking. Sannazarius varied his theme by piscatory dialogues, but even the sea may be exhausted by a descriptive writer. And the pastorals of antiquity will not be found easy of improvement by additions or diversifications.

Virgil, whose judgment and execution were exquisite, defines the pastoral as a "poem in which any action or passion is represented by its effects upon a country life." He does not mention the Golden Age, and the only reason why it has been introduced is that, since shepherds are incapable of harmonious numbers or delicate sentiments, "the reader must exalt his ideas of the pastoral character, by carrying his thoughts back to the age in which the care of herds and flocks was the employment of the wisest and greatest men." The pastoral has

therefore degenerated into a mere dialogue, in which questions of politics and religion are discussed. But granted that the rural speakers may possess learning, is it therefore consistent that they should speak a Doric dialect? "Surely, at the same time that a shepherd learns theology, he may gain some acquaintance with his native language."

Finally, "as one absurdity must naturally be expected to make way for another, [authors] have written with an utter disregard both of life and nature, and filled their productions with mythological allusions, with incredible fictions, and with sentiments which neither passion nor reason could have dictated, since the change which religion has made in the whole system of the world."

The last quotation tells us the reason for Johnson's attack upon the pastoral. Through excessive use a once acceptable poetical convention had become obsolete as an instrument for portraying life and nature and now possessed no power of exciting the passions or of appealing to the reason. The unnaturalness and incongruity of the dialogues between shepherds were his special aversion. How utterly unromantic he could be is indicated by his remarks upon the inadaptability of natural scenery, particularly of the sea, as a background for these rural dissertations.

Throughout the *Lives of the Poets* we have similar protests against this servile imitation. No man can be a metaphysical poet, he declares in the *Life of Cowley*, "by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations."[1] Hammond's elegies have neither nature, passion, nor manners. "Where there is fiction, there is no passion; he that describes himself as a shepherd, and his Neaera or Delia as a shepherdess, and talks of goats and lambs, feels no passion. . . . [He] has few sentiments drawn from nature, and few images from modern life. He produces nothing but frigid pedantry."[2]

1. *Lives*, I, 21. 2. *Ibid.* II, 315.

Ambrose Philips's *Pastorals* flattered the imagination with Arcadian scenes, but suffered from too much commendation. At the revival of learning in Italy these dialogues of imaginary swains were found easy of execution, for the conversation of shepherds naturally excludes profound or refined sentiment; "and, for images and descriptions, Satyrs and Fauns, and Naiads and Dryads, were always within call, and woods and meadows, and hills and rivers, supplied variety of matter, which, having a natural power to sooth the mind, did not quickly cloy it." [1] Then follows a history of the pastoral, from Theocritus and Virgil, through Petrarch, Mantuan, Tasso, and Sannazaro, down to "our Spenser."

He regretted that Shenstone's *Pastoral Ballad* was pastoral, for the mind sickens at the mention of the *crook*, the *pipe*, the *sheep*, and the *kids*. "The poet's art is selection, and he ought to shew the beauties without the grossness of the country life." [2] His opinion of the fatal influence of such pastoral unrealities is made clear in his reference to the poet Savage's amusing himself with the pleasing deception of country life. He had with his usual irreponsibility planned out a scheme of life for the country, knowledge of which he had only from pastorals and songs. "He imagined that he should be transported to scenes of flowery felicity, like those which one poet has reflected to another; and had projected a perpetual round of innocent pleasures, of which he suspected no interruption from pride, or ignorance, or brutality." [3]

Johnson, resting in this position, did not always penetrate beyond the outward dress of a poem. Perhaps no criticism of his has received harsher criticism than that upon *Lycidas*. He denies to this poem either nature or truth or art, for there is nothing new. "Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are long ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces

1. *Lives*, III, 317. 2. *Ibid.* III, 356. 3. *Ibid.* II, 410.

dissatisfaction on the mind." He further objects to the introduction of the heathen deities, Jove and Phoebus, Neptune and Aeolus, among the flocks and herds, with such imagery as a college can supply. "Nothing can less display knowledge or exercise invention than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion and must now feed his flocks alone, without any judge of his skill in piping; and how one god asks another god what is become of Lycidas, and how neither god can tell.[1] Such an account will neither excite sympathy nor confer honour." [2] Johnson, in consequence of his prejudice against the pastoral, fails to perceive the pure convention so exquisitely revived and the delicate artistic illusion employed. By temperament and training he was incapable of grasping the poem's subtle music, its wonderful classical flavor, or the personal note behind it. He could not see the youthful idealist facing troublous times and looking back with longing upon his happy youth just as he is about to enter upon the heroic struggle for what he believed to be the cause of righteousness. For Johnson was a Tory and regarded Milton as a "surly republican." Johnson indeed always had the courage of his own opinions, and so his criticism makes consistent his whole outlook upon the pest of pastoral imitation.

This warfare in the cause of good sense naturally led him to give his attention to the special form it assumed in the imitation of Spenser's diction and stanza. As he objected to the servile copying of unnatural dialogues between impossible shepherds, so he also objected to the employment of obsolete

1. See *R.* 37 for an indirect reference to *Lycidas*. "It is improper to give the title of a pastoral to verses, in which the speakers, after the slight mention of their flocks, fall to complaint of errours in the church, and corruptions in the government, or to lamentations of the death of some illustrious person, whom, when once the poet has called a shepherd, he has no longer any labour upon his hands, but can make the clouds weep, and lilies wither, and the sheep hang their heads, without art or learning, genius or study."

2. *Lives*, I, 164.

language. Thus the *Proeme* of Gay's *Pastorals*, composed after this manner, was in a style never spoken or written in any age or any place.[1] Prior's imitation of Spenser, consisting principally of *I ween* and *I weet*, without exclusion of later modes of speech, makes his poem neither ancient nor modern. By the help of such simple devices and vulgar trappings, "without acquaintance with life and without knowledge of art or nature, a poem of any length, cold and lifeless like this, may be written on any subject."[2]

As usual, when the charge is made that Johnson is attacking a great poet or a literary form, a careful examination of his remarks will reveal that he seldom goes further than to expose in the name of nature the lifeless imitations of that poet or that form. Just so was it in the case of Spenser. He admits that the poet West's imitations of Spenser are successfully performed, but declares that such compositions, since their effect is local and temporary, are not to be reckoned among the great achievements of intellect; their appeal is to the memory rather than to the passions or the reason, and they presuppose an accidental or artificial state of mind. They deserve the praise of industry but not of genius, and can never be more than the petty amusement of a day.[3]

It is unfortunate that Johnson did not give some authoritative expression of his opinion of Spenser's poetry. The stray remarks that we have are not unfavorable He took, for example, great interest in Warton's *Essay on Spenser* and offered him whatever aid he could give.[4] He did not include Spenser in the *Lives of the Poets* because Spenser was not one of the poets the booksellers desired to publish. Speaking of the English language in the time of Elizabeth, in the Preface to the *Dictionary*, he observed that the dialects of poetry and of fiction have been learned from Spenser and Sidney. And of the machinery

1. *Lives*, II, 269.
2. *Ibid.* II, 204.
3. *Ibid.* III, 332–33.
4. *Bos.* I, 270.

in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he says that common tradition had made fairies familiar, and that Spenser's poem had made them great.

Naturally the Spenser-lover turns to *Rambler* 121 and holds it up as an unanswerable example of wilfully perverse judgments upon a great poet. Spenser's style unpleasing! tiresome by its uniformity and adopted without due regard for the genius of the language! These can be but the official utterances of an unsympathetic age.

Let us see, however, just what Johnson did mean by these assertions. In the first place, he is condemning the imitation of a style admitted in its own day to be archaic and therefore very much more so two centuries later. Moreover, the flow of the Spenserian stanza in the hands of unskilful versifiers is almost sure to prove monotonous. He admits that it may be proper enough to imitate the fictions and sentiments of Spenser, "for allegory is one of the most pleasing forms of instruction"; but he declines to extend the same approval to the imitation of his diction and stanza, for if Ben Jonson admitted that he "writ no language," why should contemporary poets follow a false god? His stanza is tiresome to the ear by its uniformity and to the attention by its length; and having been founded in imitation of the Italian poets, whose lack of varied terminations forced them to admit a large number of rhymes in one stanza, it is unfitted to the genius of our language, which possesses so much diversity that it is seldom convenient to bring many rhymes together. It has been "justly observed by Milton that rhyme obliges poets to express their thoughts in improper terms; these improprieties must always be multiplied as the difficulty of rhyme is increased by long concatenations."

We need not accept these reflections without reserve, but it should be understood that it was one of Johnson's habits to overemphasize whatever he might be saying in defence of a thesis he was maintaining or a reform he was promoting. In

the same number of the *Rambler* he declares that the imitators of Spenser, not being very rigid censors of themselves, seem to conclude that, after disfiguring their lines with a few obsolete syllables, they have succeeded, without considering that by the same law of logic they ought to exclude every word coined since his day, just as the law of imitation is broken by Hector's quoting Aristotle in the play. Even if the style of Spenser could by long labor be justly copied, "life is, surely, given us for higher purposes than to gather what our ancestors have wisely thrown away, and to learn what is of no value, but because it is forgotten."

Against the imitation of Spenser, then, as against the imitation of the ballads, of antiquity, and of the pastoral in general, Johnson revealed a consistent hostility. It may be taken for granted, I think, that he retained no feeling against Spenser himself. On the other hand, had he chosen to express his real opinion of Spenser, it probably would not have been one of enthusiastic approval. Neither Spenser's fairy world nor his aimless narrative of romantic extravagances would have offered an attractive field to a man of Johnson's rational nature; neither would the critic have found there much to improve his knowledge of human life. If Spenser was to receive his approval — and there can be little doubt that Johnson did approve of Spenser — it was as the grave and moral teacher whose mission it was to delight and instruct mankind, a side of the poet which some later readers have unfortunately neglected.

Though he disliked conventional imitations, he knew and appreciated good translations from the classics. He had, it is true, no conception of the modern scientific zeal for literal accuracy in translation, nor did he even insist upon a general conformity to the original. That "poetical wonder of wonders," the English *Iliad*, he declared to be the noblest version of poetry the world had seen, and its publication one of the

great events in the annals of literature. His remarks on translating Homer are worthy of notice as representing the eighteenth-century view of the art of translation. Since Homer's positions are general and his representations natural, with little dependence on local or temporary custom, it is less necessary to make minute inquiries into the force of words in translating Homer than other poets.[1] From this point he proceeds to a defence of Pope's "elegance" as a substitute for Homer's vigor, already commented on. Pope's purpose was to appeal to the popular mind, and to do this he was obliged to add little graces that the public might demand. "To a thousand cavils one answer is sufficient; the purpose of a writer is to be read, and the criticism which would destroy the power of pleasing must be blown aside. Pope wrote for his own age and his own nation: he knew that it was necessary to colour the images and to point the sentiments of his author; he therefore made him graceful, but lost him some of his sublimity." [2] How much of Homer's sublimity was lost in the transcription into another mode of speech Johnson did not seem to perceive. The *Anacreon* of Cowley also had admitted modern graces for the sake of popular appeal, and perhaps the greatest part of those whom courtesy and ignorance are content to style the Learned would agree with the common reader if they honestly declared their preferences.[3] In a word, Johnson, scholar that he was, declared himself in favor of such adaptations of the classics as would attract the ordinary reader of poetry in the same degree as would native verse. The art of translation was to receive its greatest impetus in the scholarship of the nineteenth century.

Toward versification, Johnson shows himself more narrowly neo-classical than in almost anything else. Though he con-

1. *Lives*, III, 114. 2. *Ibid.* III, 240.

3. *Ibid.* I, 39. See *Ibid.* 79: "He [Denham] appears to have been one of the first that understood the necessity of emancipating translation from the drudgery of counting lines and interpreting single words."

sidered himself a competent critic of versification, it need hardly be said that this office should have been almost the last to be assigned to him. He was in truth constitutionally incapable of distinguishing the subtle harmonies of English verse; he had neither an ear for music nor a temperament sensitive to the sweetness of lyric poetry.

Like Dryden and succeeding critics, he gives credit to Waller and Denham for having improved our taste and advanced our language, though he reveals a spirit in the Preface to the *Dictionary* liberal enough to declare that the age of Elizabeth was the golden age of English poetry, and to name Spenser and Shakespeare as models of English. The apparent inconsistency between these two statements can be reconciled by pointing out that he, following the observations of countless men of letters, looked upon the neo-classical versifiers as the founders of the modern school of correctness. Without Waller, he believed, Pope could not have written as he did, and the most perfect fabric of English verse, the heroic couplet, would not have attained its perfection. He perceived also justly enough that no outward standards of criticism had been applied to Shakespeare's diction and versification while it was in the making, and that therefore in the midst of a marvellous wealth of poetry there existed many improprieties and inelegances which an age of more rigid critical standards would wish away. These standards Waller had applied to himself and had thus founded a new diction and a new versification which were to dominate poetical production for more than a century.

Again, as was so often the case, Johnson's principles were sound. The primary requisites of any sound versification are uniformity and regularity, for "the essence of verse is regularity, and its ornament is variety." He admitted that, though verse was governed by the disposal of syllables and sounds harmoniously placed according to some settled rule, such rule should be flexible enough to admit change without breach of

order, and to relieve the ear without disappointing it.[1] This definition might perhaps be stretched to cover most of the ordinary cases of versification, but it is rather in Johnson's practical application of it to Milton's verse, that we see how unqualified he really was to pass on the work of one of the great masters of harmony in the language. He observes of Milton's habit of mingling iambic and trochaic feet in the same line, that it is a deviation from established practice and a gross violation of the law of metre,[2] thereby proving himself incompetent to judge of the verse of any poet who chose to employ a verse-form other than the heroic couplet.

The versification of Pope was therefore to him the model of regularity and correctness. His version of the *Iliad* tuned the English tongue, for since its appearance no poet, however deficient in natural gifts, has wanted melody. "Such a series of lines so elaborately corrected and so sweetly modulated took possession of the publick ear," and the mellifluence of Pope's numbers made the diction of poetry "more splendid." Pope discovered this most perfect fabric of English verse by perusing the works of Dryden, who in turn studied in the school of Waller and Denham. Pope's poetry had been censured as too uniformly musical, glutting the ear with unvaried sweetness, but Johnson suspected that to be the cant of those who judge by principles rather than by perception, and who would have found less pleasure in studied discords, in broken lines, or varied stanzas.[3]

Within the limits of the heroic couplet Johnson proves himself an adequate judge of versification. He condemns the overflow from one couplet to another, of which Denham was guilty, though he asserts that from this sort of "concatenated metre" he afterwards refrained and taught his followers to conclude the sense in couplets, "which has perhaps been with rather too

1. *Lives*, I, 467. See also II, 210; I, 2.
2. *R.* 86.
3. *Lives*, III, 238, 248.

much constancy pursued." This last clause exhibits just a flash of his ever-ready common sense.[1] Of Prior's verses he remarks that they are such as mere diligence may attain; "they seldom offend the ear, and seldom sooth it; they commonly want airiness, lightness, and facility; what is smooth is not soft. His verses always roll, but they seldom flow." [2]

A general antagonism to blank verse was one of his peculiar prejudices, as indeed it was peculiar to his century. No doubt a sense of the nascent romanticism expressing itself in its cultivation by all sorts of poets tended to inflame him against it. But here he employs his natural good sense in distinguishing between the kind of subjects which lend themselves to blank verse treatment and those which do not. We find a note in Boswell which pretty well defines his opinion of the misuse of blank verse: "He was no admirer of blank verse, and said it always failed, unless sustained by the dignity of the subject. In blank verse, he said, the language suffered more distortion, to keep it out of prose, than any inconvenience or limitation to be apprehended from the shackles and circumspection of rhyme."[3] He again enlarged very convincingly upon the excellence of rhyme over blank verse, and could have hugged Adam Smith when he heard that he preferred rhyme to blank verse.[4] He believed that a poem frigidly didactic and without the aid of rhyme is so near to prose that the reader scorns it for pretending to be verse. Bold flights and striking images are necessary to the support of blank verse; otherwise it has little or no operation upon the ear or mind.[5]

Appropriateness, then, of subject to its medium of expression is, in his opinion, necessary, particularly with respect to blank verse, which, unless dignified by the weightiness of the subject-matter, is liable to become very blank indeed. He could praise Thomson because his mode of thinking and ex-

1. *Lives*, I, 81. 2. *Ibid.* II, 210. 3. *Bos.* II, 124.
4. *Ibid.* I, 494–95. 5. *Lives*, I, 237.

pressing his thoughts was original, his blank verse being all his own. Blank verse finds its proper use in the *Seasons:* "Thomson's wide expansion of general views, and his enumeration of circumstantial varieties, would have been obstructed and embarrassed by the frequent intersections of the sense, which are the necessary effects of rhyme." [1] The blank verse of Akenside, whose odes had received severe censure, has the merit that the general fabrication of the lines is perhaps superior to that of every other writer of blank verse, a judgment that seems almost wilfully perverse. But he admits that the concatenation of his verses is too long continued, and that the full close does not occur with sufficient frequency; because nothing is distinguished, nothing is remembered. "The exemption which blank verse affords from the necessity of closing the sense with the couplet, betrays luxuriant and active minds into such self-indulgence that they pile image upon image, ornament upon ornament, and are not easily persuaded to close the sense at all. Blank verse will therefore, I fear, be too often found in description exuberant, in argument loquacious, and in narrative tiresome." He adds that Akenside has fewer artifices of disgust than most of his brethren of the blank song, rarely recalling old phrases or twisting his metre into harsh inversions.[2]

No doubt much of Johnson's objection to blank verse has to do, as similarly in the case of the Spenserian stanza, with eighteenth-century Miltonic revivals and the gradual increase of blank-verse experiments. After giving a history of the introduction of blank verse, he advocates, in the *Life of Milton*, the use of rhyme over blank verse, though he cannot prevail on himself to wish that Milton had been a rhymer. "'Rhyme,' he says, — and says truly, — 'is no necessary adjunct of true poetry.' But perhaps of poetry as a mental operation metre or musick is no necessary adjunct; it is, however, by the musick of metre that poetry has been discriminated in all

1. *Lives*, III, 299. 2. *Ibid.* III, 417.

languages, and in languages melodiously constructed with a due proportion of long and short syllables metre is sufficient. But one language cannot communicate its rules to another; where metre is scanty and imperfect some help is necessary. The musick of the English heroick line strikes the ear so faintly that it is easily lost, unless all the syllables of every line co-operate together; this co-operation can be only obtained by the preservation of every verse unmingled with another as a distinct system of sounds, and this distinctness is obtained and preserved by the artifice of rhyme. The variety of pauses, so much boasted by the lovers of blank verse, changes the measures of an English poet to the periods of a declaimer; and there are only a few skilful and happy readers of Milton who enable their audience to perceive where the lines end or begin. 'Blank verse,' said an ingenuous critick, 'seems to be verse only to the eye.'

"Poetry may subsist without rhyme, but English poetry will not often please; nor can rhyme ever be safely spared but where the subject is able to support itself. Blank verse makes some approach to that which is called the 'lapidary style'; has neither the easiness of prose nor the melody of numbers, and therefore tires by long continuance. Of the Italian writers without rhyme, whom Milton alleges as precedents, not one is popular; what reason could urge in its defence has been confuted by the ear." [1]

In a series of papers in the *Rambler* (numbers 86, 88, 90, 92, 94) he has gone into considerable detail regarding Milton's versification, unconsciously revealing how absurd a rigid application of established laws to a master of blank verse like Milton may become. He defines the pure and the mixed measure, allowing for the sake of variety the introduction of an occasional change of measure, even at the sacrifice of the harmony of the line. He gives numerous examples of this freedom

1. *Lives*, I, 192–93.

and then declares that, except for the first pair of syllables, which may be considered as arbitrary, a poet with less of genius and learning than Milton should seldom suffer more than one aberration from the rule in any single verse. Even Milton is not suffered to escape scot-free, for the critic condemns the practice of substituting trochaics for iambics!

In the next paper (88) he discusses the softness of Milton's numbers. Milton's ear being accustomed to Italian poetry, he calls in a softer word when possible; hence his fondness for a series of proper names. Milton's use of elision, now disused in English poetry (!), is condemned because he has left our harsh cadences still harsher. He concludes the paper with some typically neo-classic sentiments, declaring that such verses, though not of themselves displeasing or dissonant, should not occur in heroic poetry, since the limitations of our language prevent any other distinction between epic and dramatic verse than this license of changing the terminations of dramatic lines and bringing them, by the relaxation of metrical rigor, nearer to prose.

The third paper (90) attempts to adjust the pauses of English poetry. Milton formed his scheme of versification upon the poets of Greece and Rome and therefore retained certain privileges from them in his own tongue, such as great variety of pauses and great liberty in connecting one verse with another.[1] Johnson insists that when the English poet connects one line with another he should never make a pause at a greater distance than three syllables from the beginning or the end of a verse. He objects to one or two syllables being "abscinded" from a verse and gives examples of Milton's failures.[2] He

1. He acutely observes that there is reason to believe that we have negligently lost part of our vowels, and that the silent *e* which our ancestors added to most of our monosyllables was once vocal.

2. "As harmony is the end of poetical measures, no part of a verse ought to be so separated from the rest as not to remain still more harmonious than prose, or to show, by the disposition of the tones, that it is part of a verse."

finally determines that a pause concluding a period should be made for the most part upon a strong syllable, as the fourth and sixth, but those which only suspend the sense may be placed upon the weaker. Above all others he prefers the rest upon the sixth syllable, and declares that he never could read some passages ending at this stop without strong emotions of delight or admiration. He concludes by observing that Milton in the pauses and flow of his verses has performed all that language will admit, and that he has excelled in the lower as well as in the higher parts of his art, and that his skill in harmony was not less than his invention or his learning.

The last two papers (92 and 94) deal with the much-discussed accommodation of the sound to the sense in verse. Johnson is skeptical of many of the examples which Dionysius of Halicarnassus has cited from Homer in support of the theory. He alludes to the famous Renaissance example of this sort of critical comment, that of Vida upon Virgil, and finally comes to Pope's celebrated attempt at the same thing in his *Essay on Criticism*. He finds that the whisper of the vernal breeze does not excel in softness or volubility, that the smooth stream runs with a perpetual jarring of consonants, and that a verse is actually lengthened into an Alexandrian to express speed. And the word *unbending* is one of the most sluggish and slow which our language affords. Without giving way to enthusiasm, we may, however, find in Milton as in Homer examples of this fitting of the sound to the sense, but oftener what critics have discovered as excellent examples of it have been merely accidental resemblances. Indeed, Milton had even failed to seize opportunities for practising this trick. He did not reject it when it came unsought, but he had a greater work to perform. "He who had undertaken to *vindicate the ways of God to man*, might have been accused of neglecting his cause, had he lavished much of his attention upon syllables and sounds."

Johnson's remarks upon versification amount briefly to this. He was a neo-classical critic and a neo-classical poet who had been brought up on the tradition of correctness, with the further handicap of nearly a complete insensibility to music. No doubt he could feel the grand but more simple majesty of big swinging verse like Dryden's and the high finish of the heroic couplet in the hands of Pope, and he held sensible views as to the fitness of blank verse for certain kinds of subjects; but he failed lamentably when he came to apply the ideas which he had learned in the school of Pope to the subtle harmonies of the blank verse of Milton's heroic poems.

A summary of Johnson's position upon the various problems of neo-classical art involves the setting forth again of the old fundamental principles of his critical method. Basing his judgments upon what he believed to be objective truth and general human nature as he had known it in London, he applied his reason and good sense, or what we should now label common sense, making these principles clear through particular criticism. In a sense recognizing the power of the imagination, he yet turned by preference to the more congenial examples of elegance and correctness which found their greatest exponent in Pope. Because he was reasonable in temper, he tended to apply the rationalizing faculty without discrimination to the highly finished product of Pope and to the exquisite poetry of Shakespeare or the vigorous lines of Gray. But throughout he was consistent: nature and truth remained the tests even of tropes and figures, and the reason and the judgment were their instruments. Toward the problem of imitation he also applied these same tests, and it is in this respect that he proved himself least a neo-classical critic and most a constructive thinker. Imitation, he declares, is indeed the object of all writing, and accordingly he prefers the imitation of common life as being that nearest to nature. By the time he came to write, the imitation of antiquity, particularly of mythological stories, had

become a lifeless convention, so that he never failed to condemn it as a violation of truth and nature. He assumed the same attitude toward the utterly threadbare revival of the pastoral, carrying his objections beyond the limits of good taste in the case of *Lycidas*, but generally exercising his fine common sense. The particular kind of pastoral imitation represented by copying Spenser's diction and stanza received no less of his censure. Finally, upon the subject of versification, one of the real tests of a critic's powers, he proved himself competent so long as he moved within the circle of the heroic couplet; but when he strayed into fields beyond his powers, he failed, as he was bound to fail. His general observations upon blank verse were, however, sound.

CHAPTER VI

The Preface to Shakespeare

THE history of Johnson's publications upon Shakespeare extends over a period of more than twenty years. In 1745 he had published anonymously his *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth: with Remarks on Sir Thomas Hanmer's Edition of Shakespeare. To which is affixed Proposals for a new Edition of Shakespeare, with a Specimen.* He received little encouragement and laid aside his plan until 1756, when he issued new *Proposals*. Meanwhile he had written admirably of Shakespeare in the *Prologue* spoken by Mr. Garrick at the opening of the Drury Lane Theatre in 1747; in 1751 he had contributed to the *Rambler* (168) his celebrated censure of the diction of *Macbeth* on the score of "lowness"; and in 1753 appeared his dedication of Mrs. Charlotte Lennox's *Shakespeare Illustrated*.[1] He had promised in the *Proposals* that his edition should be published on or before Christmas, 1757, but, as was usual with him in the projection of any great work, he underestimated the labor involved. In December, 1757, he promised it by the following March, and in March he declared it would appear before summer.[2] The subscriptions paid for and already spent, he now sank back into that dangerous indolence which was one of his besetting sins. He would probably never have redeemed his promises, had not a stinging rebuke administered to him in Churchill's *Ghost* roused his dormant powers.

> He for subscribers bates his hook,
> And takes your cash; but where's the book?

1. *Bos.* I, 255.

2. *Ibid.* I, 318, 323, 327.

No matter where; wise fear, you know,
Forbids the robbing of a foe;
But what, to serve our private ends,
Forbids the cheating of our friends?

Boswell records that in 1764 and 1765 Johnson was hard at work at the edition, and in October, 1765, it finally appeared.[1]

The work at once received great attention. Kenrick, who had previously assailed the *Dictionary* in his *Deformities of Dr. Johnson*, the same year issued *A Review of Dr. Johnson's New Edition of Shakespeare, in which the Ignorance or Inattention of that Editor is exposed, and the Poet defended from the Persecution of his Commentators*, and Tyrwhitt's *Observations and Conjectures upon some Passages of Shakespeare*, 1776, was practically an examination of Johnson's work. A good deal of the current criticism of the *Preface* dealt with the reflections there expressed against the "Unities," and the reviews of the day, the *Critical* and the *Monthly*, took positions respectively for and against the author's conclusions. Notices also appeared in the *London Magazine*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and the *Annual Register*. Altogether the publication of the eight volumes was considered an important event in the annals of learning.

These criticisms, though they elicited no reply from the editor, yet revealed to him and to the public the defects and limitations of the work. Johnson was no great antiquary and, notwithstanding his claim to an expert knowledge of the history of the language, he possessed no special acquaintance with Elizabethan English. Indolence or chance or, more probably, defective eyesight had prevented an effective collation of early quartos of the plays with the folios, and he had contented himself with printing the greater part of the text from Warburton's unreliable edition. He recognized his shortcomings and

1. "In 1764 and 1765 it should seem that Dr. Johnson was so busily employed with his edition of Shakespeare, as to have had little leisure for any other literary exertion, or, indeed, even for private correspondence." *Bos.* II, 1.

consented to a revision of the text by George Steevens, a far more accurate Elizabethan scholar, if not his equal as a literary critic. The revised text appeared in 1773, containing the emendations and notes which had been retained from the edition of 1765 carefully labelled as Johnson's own, and the new ones with the proper acknowledgments.

The eighteenth-century appreciation of Shakespeare was genuine if somewhat grudging. Up to the publication of Dr. Johnson's great *Preface*, critics of the poet had, consciously or not, adopted the opinions of one or the other of two schools of criticism. Dryden's great influence as a man of letters and his splendid critical utterances had founded a kind of traditional admiration for Shakespeare's mighty though untutored genius. His own struggles to free himself from the bondage of the rules had prevented as outspoken an admiration of his idol as his inclinations might have warranted. And yet he has left us a tribute to the elder dramatist as glowing, as inspired, as any of the more self-conscious eulogies composed a hundred and twenty-five years later. On the other side stood Rymer, the strict interpreter of the rules of Aristotle, and the exemplar of narrowness and pedantry in their application. His violent onslaught upon Shakespearean tragedy, on the score of its violation of the neo-classical doctrine of verisimilitude, was heeded and respected by eighteenth-century editors of Shakespeare down to the time of Johnson, who finally disposed of the Rymer fetich, as he was destined to destroy many another neo-classical bogey through this same *Preface* to Shakespeare. But before the time of Johnson, Rymer's point of view, whether discredited as a whole or not, had induced men to lament Shakespeare's want of art and to seek subjects for praise in his strength and faithful imitation of nature as a partial recompense for ignorance of the rules.

Johnson, never stooping to apologize for his author's defects, placed himself staunchly with the school of Dryden. He com-

mends Dryden's account of Shakespeare as a "perpetual model of encomiastick criticism" and admires the comprehensiveness of the exhibition. Later editors, he says, can but boast of having diffused or paraphrased this epitome of excellence, of having changed Dryden's gold for baser metal, of lower value though of greater bulk. He praises Dryden's remarks as the criticism of a poet, "not a dull collection of theorems, nor a rude detection of faults, which perhaps the censor was not able to have committed; but a gay and vigorous dissertation, where delight is mingled with instruction, and where the author proves his right of judgement by his power of performance."[1]

He is equally emphatic in his criticism of Rymer's rough-shod methods of wholesale destruction. "With Dryden," he declares, "we are wandering in quest of Truth, whom we find, if we find her at all, drest in the graces of elegance; and if we miss her, the labour of the pursuit rewards itself: we are led only through fragrance and flowers. Rymer, without taking a nearer, takes a rougher way; every step is to be made through thorns and brambles, and Truth, if we meet her, appears repulsive by her mien and ungraceful by her habit. Dryden's criticism has the majesty of a queen; Rymer's has the ferocity of a tyrant." It is Rymer to whom he replies in the *Preface*, directly; now it is Rymer and Dennis and Voltaire upon Shakespeare's disregard for the decorum of his characters; again it is Voltaire and Rymer upon tragi-comedy; and finally it is Rymer and Voltaire upon the Unities. "The petty cavils of petty minds," in applying "rules merely positive" to the comprehensive genius of Shakespeare, succeed only in showing the littleness of the critics.

Mr. Saintsbury's sweeping assertion, in his *History of Criticism*, as to the utter worthlessness of the *Preface*, and the contemptuous attitude of other temperamental critics toward this famous document, have tended to obscure the real critical

1. *Lives*, I, 412.

merits underlying its somewhat declamatory style. I wish to offer a reasonable defense by a brief analysis, largely through a paraphrase of Johnson's own words, of the three or four topics he has discussed: what he has to say upon the eighteenth-century dictum that Shakespeare was above all things the poet of nature, whose plays were after all greater than the rules; his criticism of certain faults of style and construction; and his attack upon the conventional neo-classical criticism, such as the unities of time and place, tragi-comedy, and verisimilitude. I hope to be able to prove that this much scorned *Preface* was a most important document in the history of criticism. I shall conclude with a comparison of the promise of the author's *Proposals* of 1756 and the degree of their fulfillment in 1765.

To Johnson, as to the whole century, just representations of general nature were the essential characteristics of the classical ideal, and Shakespeare appealed to all as the great poet of nature, who held up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. Neither his greatness as a poet nor his delightful romantic situations came first to the minds of the critics who regarded Dryden and Pope as the supreme expression of the poetical spirit; they turned rather by preference to what they deemed his interpretation of human nature in terms of universal experience. Johnson, whose mind was stocked with principles depending on nature and truth as formulated by classical critics, and whose temper was essentially reasonable, found these sentiments too congenial for him to adopt any other approach to his poet.

He looked upon Shakespeare, to paraphrase his own words, as the poet who, by making nature predominate over accident, has depicted the influence of those general passions by which all minds are agitated, and has succeeded beyond all others in painting life in its native colors. Unlike other poets, whose characters are individuals, he has commonly kept his a species,

but in so doing he has revealed the great power of his genius, for he has more than any kept his characters distinct from each other. The men and women of Shakespeare are individuals, universalized into the type, whose actions and conduct may have their application to ordinary men and ordinary life. Thus the law of Aristotle has been obeyed by the untutored genius whose art was formed by his experience alone.

At this point Johnson takes occasion to contrast the "barbarous romances" and their appeal to the love of sensation and the extraordinary with the creations of Shakespeare, who has no heroes, whose scenes are occupied by men speaking and acting as the reader thinks he would have spoken and acted on the same occasion. Even where the agency is supernatural, he continues, the dialogue is level with life, for Shakespeare "approximates the remote and familiarizes the wonderful," and he has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigencies but as it would be found in trials to which it cannot be exposed. This is not merely a complete exposition of Aristotelian doctrine, but it also reveals the author's bias toward realism which I have previously noted.

Not only his characters, but their means of expression, are above all natural, and therefore truthful. Determined by the incident which produced it and exactly suited to the character speaking, the dialogue moves with so much ease and simplicity that it seems to have been gleaned from common conversation and common occurrences. His natural disposition led him to comedy, and his comic dialogue has suffered little decay. His characters are natural, and therefore durable, for "the discriminations of true passion are the colours of nature"; their speech also corresponds to their characterization. The style which remains settled and unaltered is to be sought in the common intercourse of life, "a conversation above grossness and below refinement, where propriety resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comick dialogue." For this reason

he deserves to be studied as one of the original masters of the language.

With these ideas in mind Johnson turns upon the critics of the poet, who have assailed him for his violations of decorum. He defends him from Dennis and Rymer and Voltaire on the ground that the poet, preserving the essential character, was not very careful of "distinctions superinduced and adventitious." His story required Romans or kings, but he thought only on men. Hence he went to the Senate-house for a buffoon and made the Danish usurper a drunkard, for he knew he violated no rule of general nature by so doing. "A poet overlooks the casual distinctions of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery."

His own courageous examination of Shakespeare's faults, however, proves that his was no blind worship of genius. These faults, sufficient to overwhelm any smaller merit, are approached in the same spirit which he assumes in his later analysis of the shortcomings of Milton, and he proceeds, "without envious malignity or superstitious veneration," [1] to point out clearly and briefly what to his mind must be labelled rather the faults than any fundamental defects of genius. He enters upon his task fearlessly but with moderation, and upon the whole has succeeded in laying before the reader Shakespeare's chief faults better than most of his successors. The poet's failure to point the moral of his fable, the loose construction of his plots, his various anachronisms, and the violations of propriety in his diction are the principal faults with which the critic charges him. Included in the last are the exchanges of mere smartness in the comic dialogue, the inflated language and the set speeches in tragedy, and the excessive use

1. "We must confess the faults of our favourite, to gain credit to our praise of his excellencies. He that claims, either in himself or for another, the honours of perfection, will surely injure the reputation which he designs to assist." Letter to Dr. Burney, Oct. 16, 1765. *Bos.* I, 500.

of conceits and quibbles throughout the plays. A brief review of each of these kinds of faults will be necessary.

The criticism of the first of the faults, the poet's lack of moral intent, is unquestionably the weak point in the entire survey. Here the eighteenth-century moralist speaks his mind, the man who prefers that rigorous justice shall be dealt to good and bad as a kind of substitute for Divine Providence; a position be it said in no degree beyond that which Rymer held a century before. If the artist sacrifices virtue to convenience, being more careful to please than to instruct, and makes no just distribution of good and evil, nor is careful to show in the virtuous a proper disapprobation of the wicked, he is no fit companion for the moral English middle class whom Johnson kept before him as his real public. The fact that Shakespeare carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and dismisses them at the close without further care, the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; "for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time and place."

In his criticism of dramatic construction, Johnson has hit upon one of Shakespeare's chief weaknesses, though, as would be expected in a critic of his time, he has failed to perceive the poet's steady development in dramatic technique. He sees merely that the plots are so loosely formed and so carelessly pursued that a slight consideration might improve them. An admirer of the regular classical drama, who lived at the end of a long period of adaptation and remodelling of the plots of the earlier age of freedom and experiment, could scarcely take any other attitude toward Shakespeare's handling of his plots. He regarded the poet as one who, not possessing any very exacting technical standards, omitted opportunities of delighting and instructing in preference for those which were more easy. He justly remarks that the latter end of his plays is evidently neglected, as the author when he was near the end of his work

chose to shorten the labor to snatch the profit. Hence the generally unsatisfactory condition of his catastrophes. These judgments are eminently classical in their nature and bear out the critic's preferences for order and careful finish in literary production.

Notwithstanding Johnson's objection to the strictures of Rymer and Voltaire, his own respect for the neo-classical doctrine of decorum led him to take exception to some of Shakespeare's anachronisms as being too great a violation of probability. "We need not wonder to find Hector quoting Aristotle, when we see the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined with the Gothick mythology of fairies." By way of extenuation, however, Sidney, living at the same time but with all the advantages of learning, has confounded the pastoral with the feudal times, the days of innocence, quiet, and security, with those of turbulence, violence, and adventure.

Johnson's recognition of the claims of decorum is further illustrated by his remarks upon the comic scenes of his author. These are marred not only by mere reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm, but by the grossness of the jests and the licentiousness of the dialogue. His gentlemen and his ladies have too little delicacy, and are not sufficiently distinguished from his clowns by the refinement of their manners. He admits by way of apology that perhaps the relaxations from formality in the reign of Elizabeth were not very elegant and consequently the requirements in the matter of propriety of language were not severe.

As I have already noted, Johnson agreed with Rymer that Shakespeare's natural bent was for comedy. In tragedy, whenever he solicits his invention or strains his faculties, the result is "tumour, meanness, tediousness, and obscurity." The poet's diction, especially in narration, which indeed in dramatic poetry is naturally tedious, becomes pompous out of all proportion, involving a wearisome train of circumlocution

and diffuseness of language. Instead of lightening these narrative scenes by brevity, he has endeavored to recommend them by dignity and splendor. Likewise, his declamations and set speeches are cold and weak, for his power was the power of nature. Occasionally he becomes entangled in an unwieldy sentiment, and, struggling with it, he expresses it in such words as occur without taking more leisure to disentangle it. Often, too, trivial sentiments and vulgar ideas disappoint the attention by being recommended by sonorous epithets and swelling figures.

Perhaps the most characteristic criticism of Shakespeare's poetic diction which Johnson could make, and which carries us back to Dryden's contrast of the diction of Shakespeare and Fletcher with the refinements of the court of Charles II, is his condemnation of conceits. He declares that the poet is never long soft or pathetic without some idle conceit or contemptible equivocation, and "terrour and pity, as they are rising in the mind, are checked and blasted by sudden frigidity." The great defender of "correctness," who was to shatter forever the reputation of the metaphysical poets, would hardly fail to pass censure on the exuberance of Shakespeare's diction. "A quibble is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to ingulf him in the mire. . . . A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety, and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it."

To say that these objections to Shakespeare's poetical style are to be put down as the perverse remarks of a critic whose temper, method, and principles of judgment were hostile to the object of his censure, would be to condemn without a fair trial

remarks uttered in all honesty and only after mature deliberation. The fact that Johnson lacked sufficient historic sense thoroughly to understand the literary and dramatic conventions current in the time of the poet should not altogether obscure the large measure of absolute value which these observations contain. Johnson has proved, I think, that a great poet of one age can be judged with some degree of fairness by the literary standards of another and a different age, provided these standards are applied to him with insight and moderation. In a word, each age possesses its modicum of absolute truth, by which any age may be tested.

The portion of the *Preface* which discusses directly the accepted standards of criticism regarding Shakespeare's violations of the laws of dramatic composition is the most striking and original contribution their author made to Shakespearean criticism. When he first came to London as a young and inexperienced student he carried in his pocket three acts of *Irene*, a play built on the most approved of neo-classical models; by 1752, however, he had attained sufficient maturity and independence of thought to be able to contribute a paper to the *Rambler* (156), defending tragi-comedy as a truthful delineation of life. In 1765 he finally broke with the critical pedants who applied the rules of the regular drama to the free art of Shakespeare. His observations upon tragi-comedy, upon the historical plays, and upon the so-called unities of time and place really marked the end of the older order of dramatic criticism and sowed the seeds of modern Shakespearean study. It seems like the irony of fate that the last great upholder of the older criticism, the staunch supporter of the principles of reason and common sense, should have prepared the way for the romantic enthusiasms of A. W. Schlegel and Manzoni, of Hazlitt and Coleridge. But so it was; and Johnson has not yet regained his former position as the sanest and most reasonable of Shakespearean critics because of the opprobrium heaped

upon him by men who stole his wares and paid him with insult and contempt.

Perhaps he has heeded the murmuring against the dogmatism of the rules, which was voiced in some of the minor periodicals of the time, when he declares that Shakespeare's plays were not, in the rigorous sense, either tragedies or comedies at all, but compositions of a distinct kind, exhibiting the real state of nature, in which were exhibited both good and evil, joy and sorrow, and the apparently orderless progression of cross purposes and victory and defeat.[1] Employing the classical interpretations of nature and of truth, he applies them to the plays of the great romantic poet and discovers that on account of their very violations of conventional dramatic form they are thereby truer to human nature. Had he kept this opinion more consistently in view, he would not perhaps have reflected with so much emphasis upon the failure in moral purpose which Shakespeare exhibits.

He declares that the ancient poets selected, some the crimes of men, and some their absurdities, intending to promote different ends by contrary means. Shakespeare, however, "has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind, but in one composition." That this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism is true, but there is always an appeal from criticism to nature. Here he deliberately lays down his own principles of judgment and makes his declaration of independence from the tyranny of the rules; for if the mingled drama approaches more closely than either tragedy or comedy to the appearance of life, it also observes the funda-

1. "Exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolick of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design." *Works*, V, 109.

mental rules of literary composition in a greater degree than any other form of the drama. He denies that the passions are interrupted in their progression, or that the principal event, being advanced in a due gradation of preparatory incidents, wants at last the power to move. "Different auditors have different habitudes; and, upon the whole, all pleasure consists in variety."

In support of his position he proceeds to define the three kinds of drama into which the plays have been divided as he conceives Shakespeare would have defined them. Neither comedy nor tragedy depended upon an action serious or elevated in tone, but upon whether the conclusion was calamitous or happy. History, not always nicely distinguished from tragedy, and a form not recognized in ordinary categories of dramatic composition, was but a series of actions with no other than chronological succession, independent of each other, and without any tendency to introduce or regulate the conclusion. This is the first important recognition of the Elizabethan chronicle history play as a legitimate form of dramatic art, and it marks a very wide departure from Rymer's rigid dogmatism. When this plan is understood, he continues, the criticisms of Rymer vanish away. Shakespeare had the world open before him at a time when the rules of the ancients were known to few and the public judgment was yet unformed; and he had the right to adopt or develop his own peculiar art, if, as he has succeeded in doing, he obeys the universal laws of truth and nature. In view of his conception of the function of the drama, he made the play of *Hamlet* to open, without impropriety, by two sentinels. "Iago bellows at Brabantio's window without injury to the scheme of the play; . . . the character of Polonius is seasonable and useful; and the Gravediggers themselves may be heard with applause."

The historical plays, being neither tragedies nor comedies, Johnson claims not to be subject to any of their laws; the

changes of action are clear, the incidents various and affecting, and the characters consistent, natural, and distinct. "No other unity is intended, and therefore none is to be sought." In his other plays Shakespeare has well enough preserved the unity of action. Though he lacks an intrigue regularly perplexed and regularly unravelled, for this is seldom the order of nature, he observes the Aristotelian requirement of a beginning, a middle, and an end; "one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence."

From this point Johnson proceeds to his famous attack upon the "Unities," finally accomplishing what Corneille and Dryden had lacked the courage to perform, in purging the neoclassical creed of one of its narrowest and most vicious dogmas. Arguing, "not dogmatically but deliberately," he again turns classical dogmas upon their critics by maintaining that the narrow limitations of time and place are founded on false premises. With unexampled audacity he tells the regular critic, "by the authority of Shakespeare," that it is false "that any representation is mistaken for reality; that any dramatick fable in its materiality was ever credible, or, for a single moment, was ever credited." This bold clearing of the decks by a sweeping denial of all dramatic illusion at once puts Johnson in a position of attack, for he has cut the Gordian knot of criticism, which had held the human reason bound for generations. Surely he who imagines that he was ever at Alexandria may in the next act imagine himself at Rome. "Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation; if the spectator can be once persuaded, that his old acquaintance are Alexander and Caesar, that a room illuminated with candles is the plain of Pharsalia, or the bank of Granicus, he is in a state of elevation above the reach of reason, or of truth, and from the heights of empyrean poetry, may despise the circumscriptions of terrestrial nature." So, a mind "wandering in ecstasy" need not count the clock if it is not able to make the stage a field.

But the truth is, according to Johnson's argument, the spectators always retain their senses, and are never deceived into believing fiction instead of truth. If, then, we grant something to the exigencies of the drama, time is of all modes of existence most obsequious to the imagination, and we may conceive of a lapse of years as easily as of a passage of hours. Likewise, the different actions that complete a story may be in places very remote from each other: either in Athens or Sicily, when the spectator knows that he is in neither Athens nor Sicily but in a modern theatre.

This interpretation of the ancient doctrine of verisimilitude as the adjustment of the imagination to a reasonable imitation of reality leads to a definition of the Aristotelian Katharsis. Briefly, for these remarks have already been quoted, Johnson denies that the spectator believes that he sees real evils before him, for then their exhibition would be too painful for him to endure. Our consciousness of fiction is the only possible explanation of the delight produced by tragedy. Imitations bring pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind. Hence it follows that between the acts a longer or shorter time may be allowed to elapse, and that the author of a drama, like the reader of a narrative, may allow to pass before him in an hour the life of a hero or the revolutions of an empire.[1]

Johnson cares not to guess whether Shakespeare knew the unities or rejected them by design, nor would he very vehemently reproach another poet who laid his first scene in Venice and his next in Cyprus. Such violations of "rules merely positive" become the comprehensive genius of Shake-

1. See *Lives*, II, 76. "To vary the place is not, in my opinion, any violation of Nature, if the change be made between the acts, for it is no less easy for the spectator to suppose himself at Athens in the second act, than at Thebes in the first; but to change the scene, as is done by Rowe in the middle of an act, is to add more acts to the play, since an act is so much of the business as is transacted without interruption."

speare, and such censures belong to the "minute and slender criticism" of Voltaire.

Then follows the famous "apology" for his temerity in going against the sense of the ages. But he reaffirms his opinion that the unities of time and place are not essential to the drama, that though they may sometimes have the power to give pleasure, they are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction. "A play, written with nice observation of critical rules, is to be contemplated as an elaborate curiosity, as the product of superfluous and ostentatious art, by which is shewn, rather what is possible, than what is necessary."

Hereupon, he makes the conventional comparison of a correct and regular writer to a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, and the plays of Shakespeare to a forest with all its splendid luxuriance of verdure and of weeds and brambles.

Actually, then, he has looked at the poet through the eyes of his century, has felt his humanity and moral power if not the full force of his poetic gifts, has criticized him upon the whole with justice for his many real errors of taste, and has magnificently risen to his defense in permitting him the privilege of a great untrammelled genius to create or to employ his own dramatic forms. Further than this he could not well go; yet his efforts really cleared away much underbrush from the paths of future critics.

This was no small achievement. If, then, he has not only done the conventional thing in his distribution of praise and blame, but has anticipated the freer approach to the great romantic poet which characterized the first thirty years of the following century, we may assert with some assurance that Dr. Johnson, contrary to his evident purpose and inclination, really marks the parting of the ways in critical method and procedure, at least as applied to Shakespeare.

As an introduction to his study of the extent of the poet's learning, Johnson, before concluding his paper, briefly, but wisely and carefully, seeks to account for his performance by a comparison with the state of the age in which he wrote and his particular opportunities. He admits that such knowledge should have no effect in one's estimate of the merit of a book or a writer, yet that curiosity is always busy to discover the circumstances and the reasons for any particular literary performance. This acceptance of historical in place of absolute standards of criticism may have received an impulse from the author's friendship with the Reverend Thomas Warton, whose *Observations on the Fairie Queene*, 1753, was one of the earliest important examples of this kind of criticism. Johnson took great interest in the work. Had he allowed his inclinations more sway, he might have committed himself more definitely.[1]

The English nation, he declares, in the time of Shakespeare was yet struggling to emerge from barbarity. He enumerates as a part of this progress the transplanting of the philology of Italy in the time of Henry VIII, the cultivation of the learned languages by Elizabethan scholars, and the reading of Italian and Spanish poets. But literature being confined to scholars or to people of rank, the public was gross and dark. Lacking a cultivated literary taste, they were fed on sensational stories of dragons, giants, and enchantments, and demanded the enactment in their theatre of strange events and fabulous transactions rather than of common occurrences, for "the mind, which has feasted on the wonders of fiction, has no taste for the insipidity of truth." Our author chose what was known to his audience; popular material familiar to those who

1. See *Bos.* I, 270. Letter to Thomas Warton on his Spenser: "You have shewn to all, who shall hereafter attempt the study of our ancient authours, the way to success; by directing them to the perusal of the books which those authours had read. . . . The reason why the authours, which are yet read, of the sixteenth century, are so little understood, is, that they are read alone; and no help is borrowed from those who lived with them, or before them."

otherwise would have been unable to follow the intricacies of the drama.

In this connection he says that Shakespeare took his English histories from English chronicles and English ballads,[1] and his classical history from North's translation of Plutarch. He also names the source of *As You Like It* as a contemporary pamphlet, rather than *The Tale of Gamelyn*, assigned to Chaucer; and the tale of *Hamlet* in plain English prose, which the critics had to seek in *Saxo Grammaticus*. Johnson's antiquarian knowledge, however, was not extensive or accurate, and does not constitute an important part of his strength as a critic.

His real insight into contemporary dramatic conditions, somewhat surprising in view of his general obtuseness when questions of dramatic procedure came up for consideration, taught him that the demands of the audience were the true cause of the hurry of incident and the show and bustle of the plays. And in respect of exciting restless and unquenchable curiosity, which is after all the first purpose of a writer, Shakespeare has excelled all but Homer, so vigorous and continuous is the action of his plays. This is the real reason for the pomps and processions upon the English stage, and this is the great difference between the poet of nature and the poet unacquainted with men. In *Cato* we find no acquaintance with human sentiments or human actions; *Othello*, on the other hand, is the vigorous offspring of observation impregnated with genius. Instead of the splendid exhibition of artificial and factitious manners which Addison affords, Shakespeare by the sweep of his genius carries us through pleasure and pain, and moves us by the power of nature alone. Johnson's comment upon the way the Shakespearean drama should be acted is but another instance of his great common sense: "His plays were written, and, at first, printed in one unbroken continuity, and

1. He refers in the notes to his Shakespeare to the ballad of *King Leir and his Three Daughters*.

ought now to be exhibited with short pauses, interposed as often as the scene is changed, or any considerable time is required to pass. This method would at once quell a thousand absurdities."

The question of Shakespeare's learning, which had agitated the critics for generations, is treated sensibly and briefly. He refuses to accept the verdict of those who attributed to their poet all the learning of the age and professed to find in his plays verbal imitations of ancient writers. Johnson prefers the testimony of Ben Jonson that he had small Latin and less Greek and declares that the fancied imitations are but easy coincidences or proverbial expressions. The small number of such quotations but prove the rule, for he would have used more if he had had them. "He was to copy, not what he knew himself, but what was known to his audience," and his audience, as already stated, was unlearned. He probably knew sufficient Latin to give him acquaintance with grammatical constructions,[1] but he doubtless obtained his knowledge of the Greek and Roman authors from the many English translations which were becoming more frequent since the introduction of learning into England. Johnson's acquaintance with the history of scholarship was of course very great.

In maintaining that the greater part of the poet's excellence was the product of his own genius, Johnson declares himself positively of the opinion that genius rather than mere learning makes the great poet. The study of man, and not the knowledge of books, has made Shakespeare's drama wonderful. And yet he made no mean contribution to dramatic art. On a stage, still in a state of the utmost rudeness, he introduced character and dialogue, carrying them in some of his happier scenes to their utmost height. He had both matter and form to provide, but by the power of his genius he was able, unaided and alone,

1. *Bos.* IV, 18. "Sir, let Farmer answer for himself: *I* never engaged in this controversy. I always said, Shakespeare had enough Latin to grammaticise his English."

to display life in its native colors. Without the advantages of high birth or of wealth and leisure, he came to London a needy adventurer, prepared to live by mean employments. His genius survived the weight of poverty and, taught in the school of experience, gained material for artistic use in the world of business and amusements. He gained an exact knowledge of many modes of life, and many casts of native dispositions, varied them with great multiplicity, and marked them by nice discriminations and proper combinations. Though imitated by all succeeding writers, he himself had none to imitate, taking his sentiments and descriptions immediately from knowledge, without distortion through the intervention of any other mind; appealing to ignorant and learned alike as a just copier of nature. "The form, the character, and the shows of the English drama are his," and to him belongs the first praise of genius, originality in form and matter.

Before leaving this subject Johnson cannot refrain from a word of warning concerning the deformities of his author. He has scarcely any play which, if now exhibited by a contemporary writer, would be heard to the conclusion. When his works satisfied his audience, they satisfied the writer, and he did not levy any ideal tribute upon future times, seeking only present popularity and present profit. He repeated the same jests, he entangled different plots by the same kind of perplexity, and he made no attempt to preserve his works that had already been published from the depravations that obscure them, or secure for the rest a better destiny by giving them to the world in their genuine state.

Johnson's explanation of the causes of these obscurities and the difficulties besetting an editor covers with a tolerable degree of completeness the various problems of Shakespearean scholarship even to-day. They are due to the shifting fashion, to the license and corruption of Elizabethan English, to the fact that he wrote the common colloquial language, and to the

careless manner of publication. To this should be added his own fullness of idea, "which might sometimes load his words with more sentiment than they could conveniently carry, and that rapidity of imagination which might hurry to a second thought before he had fully explained the first"; and we need not go further to seek the difficulties in the way of Shakespearean scholarship.

"There are two things," Johnson once said to Sir Joshua Reynolds, "which I am confident I can do very well: one is an introduction to any literary work, stating what it is to contain, and how it should be executed in the most perfect manner; the other is a conclusion, shewing from various causes why the execution has not been equal to what the authour promised to himself and to the publick." [1] These two things he had formerly done for his *Dictionary*, and he was once again to do them for his edition of Shakespeare. In his second *Proposals* nine years before (1756) he had promised a careful collation of the oldest copies and a noting of all the observable variations of text. He would use his judgment in textual criticism, making no conjectures wantonly or unnecessarily. He promised to read the books his author read, tracing his knowledge to its source and comparing copies with originals. He would explain obsolete or peculiar diction to the best of his ability; and, finally, he would paraphrase or interpret entangled passages, explain forgotten customs, and illustrate doubtful words by references to other authorities of the same age as the author.

This exposition of the duties of an editor has never been surpassed for comprehensive insight into what ought to be done in critical exegesis. That Johnson's performance did not equal his promise is not surprising when we consider that at his time of life (*ætatis* 57) he was past the point of collating texts and that his antiquarian knowledge was none too exact. He admits that "the complete explanation of an author not

1. *Bos.* I, 292.

systematick and consequential, but desultory and vagrant, abounding in casual allusions and light hints, is not to be expected from any single scholiast." Personal allusions, customs, and references to contemporary events must to a large extent be resigned to time for explanation. Conjecture had been carefully indulged, and he makes manly acknowledgment of his difficulties. "It has been my settled principle that the reading of the ancient books is probably true, and therefore is not to be disturbed for the sake of elegance, perspicuity, or mere improvement of the sense. . . . As I practised conjecture more I learned to trust it less; and after I had printed a few plays, resolved to insert none of my own readings in the text. Upon this caution I now congratulate myself, for every day increases my doubt of my emendations." This wise caution and modest admission of limitation might well be taken to heart by other editors of the poet. He makes this other excellent remark, confirming his attitude upon textual criticism: "I have always suspected that the reading is right, which requires many words to prove it wrong; and the emendation wrong, that cannot without so much labour appear to be right." From this sound statement of his views he proceeds to apologize for the inadequacy of his edition, admitting with candor that no expectation has been more disappointed than his own, but affirming that he has honestly performed the labor.

He concludes with his observation, already cited, in respect to the mental attitude to be maintained in approaching a great poet, and quotes in support of his contention Dryden's famous panegyric upon the poet.

CHAPTER VII

Criticism of the Drama

OUTSIDE of Shakespeare, Johnson's remarks upon the drama are hardly more than incidental. His physical infirmities prevented him from enjoying the theatre, so that, beyond some complimentary words about the plays of Goldsmith and Sheridan, he has practically nothing to say about the contemporary drama. In the lives of Dryden, Congreve, and Otway he has made some comment upon their dramatic work.

The heroic drama he did not like, mainly because its chief feature, the exaltation of love as the grand master-passion in life, he looked upon as an outrage upon both life and art. Of Dryden's heroic plays he can say little that is good, and this good is expressed for us in his somewhat grudging comment on the two parts of the *Conquest of Granada*, which, he declares, were written "with a seeming determination to glut the publick with dramatick wonders; to exhibit in its highest elevation a theatrical meteor of incredible love and impossible valour, and to leave no room for a wilder flight to the extravagance of posterity." He adds: "All the rays of romantick heat . . . glow in Almanzor by a kind of concentration. He is above all laws; he is exempt from all restraints; he ranges the world at will, and governs wherever he appears. He fights without enquiring the cause, and loves in spite of the obligations of justice, of rejection by his mistress, and of prohibition from the dead." And yet he finds a delight in the scenes, for they exhibit a kind of "illustrious depravity and majestick madness," in which the ridiculous is mingled with the astonishing.[1]

1. *Lives*, I, 348–49.

Congreve's plays he admitted he had not read for some years. He grants him the high merit of originality, but describes the characters as fictitious and artificial, with very little of nature and not much of life. He calls them "intellectual gladiators"; every sentence wounds or strikes, and the wit plays to and fro like a meteor. His comedies have, therefore, in some degree, the operation of tragedies, for they surprise rather than divert, and raise admiration oftener than merriment. He offered, however, his hearty admiration to *The Mourning Bride*, whose night scene he labelled the most poetical paragraph in English poetry.[1]

Rowe and Otway receive brief comment. The former shows little search into nature, no discrimination into character, or nice display of the progress of passion, for all is general and undefined. His reputation rests upon his propriety, his elegance, and his suavity; he elevates and delights if he does not move or improve. *Jane Shore*, being domestic, will always be heard with pity.[2] Of Otway little is said, though Johnson grants him the power of moving the passions. Boswell records Johnson as saying, "Sir, he is all tenderness."[3] The only other Restoration dramatist to whom he makes reference is Farquhar, who, he says, has considerable merit.[4]

In the year 1737, when as a young scholar he accompanied David Garrick to London in search of fame and fortune, he carried in his pocket three acts of the tragedy *Irene*. This manuscript was the work of a serious-minded student without any practical dramatic experience, who had consequently modelled his drama on what he conceived to be the approved classical lines. He obeys the Unities and follows the French convention in the arrangement of scenes; more important,

1. *Lives*, II, 228–30. "He who reads those lines enjoys for a moment the powers of a poet: he feels what he remembers to have felt before, but he feels it with great increase of sensibility; he recognises a familiar image, but meets it again amplified and expanded, embellished with beauty, and enlarged with majesty."

2. *Ibid.* II, 76. 3. *Bos.* IV, 21, n. 1. 4. *Ibid.* IV, 8.

however, is the manner in which the theme indicates the young author's reading and the opinions which he held concerning the problem of the purpose of art.

Some lines of the *Prologue* give a clue as to how he had been thinking. He says at the beginning:

> Our daring bard, with spirit unconfin'd;
> Spreads wide the mighty moral for mankind.
> Learn here, how heaven supports the virtuous mind;

thus declaring the earnest aim with which he composed the tragedy. Other lines reflect his opinion of the heroic drama:

> If truths, like these, with pleasing language join;
> Ennobled, yet unchang'd, if nature shine;
> If no wild draught depart from reason's rules;
> Nor gods his heroes, nor his lovers fools. . . .

Already he was beginning to react from the fustian of the drama of love and honor, and already he was employing the terms which were to become the basis of his literary criticism. "He rolls no thunders o'er the drowsy pit," he asserted in the same *Prologue* (which indeed may not have been written until 1749 when Garrick brought out the play, the year before Johnson began the publication of the *Rambler*).

The plot of *Irene* seems to be a direct answer to the romantic exaltation of love upon which the heroic drama is based, developing as its theme the calamities which misplaced and unrestrained love may cause. A band of young Greeks are conspiring against Mahomet, Emperor of the Turks, to regain the freedom of their beloved land from the tyranny of the despot. One of them, Demetrius, loves Aspasia, a noble and virtuous Greek maiden who has rejected the advances of the Emperor. Into her mouth the author has put most of the sententious morality in which the play abounds. Another beautiful Greek, Irene, also beloved by the Emperor, is about to yield her charms to him, believing that she may bring un-

told blessings to her country through her influence over her lover. Aspasia counsels her to resist the temptation of sentimental folly, for, she declares, good cannot come from yielding to sin. Meanwhile the conspiracy has been betrayed by Abdalla, a young Turkish conspirator, also in love with Aspasia. The Emperor sends to apprehend the traitor, and Demètrius is found with Aspasia in Irene's apartments. The two lovers manage to escape, but Irene, deluding herself with thought of her power, is finally led to execution before she can see her angry lord.

The play, in brief, is a kind of moral tract directed against the false and distorted ideals of conduct depicted in the heroic play. In his emphasis on a single moral idea, in his idealization of character, and in his attempt to maintain an elevated diction, the young author reveals his reading in classical tragedy. The fact that "Declamation roar'd whilst Passion slept" is merely a criticism of its artistic merit. We should not forget, in this connection, the author's reply in later years when asked how he felt at the failure of his play, "Like the Monument." Anti-romantic, then, and strongly moral in character, the play gives us clear indications of the nature of the author's thinking before he had published any of his better-known work. It might also be noted that, instead of attacking contemporary sentimental drama, he has gone back nearly two generations to war against a drama long dead. With respect to the theatre he always remained a man of books, perhaps because his defective eyesight and hearing prevented him from enjoying this form of amusement.

We now come to his chief contribution to actual dramatic criticism, the notes to his edition of Shakespeare. These, although they would repay exhaustive study, can here receive but brief and fragmentary treatment. A glance at the value of his textual emendations and at the main excellences and defects of his comments and interpretations, showing in outline

the manner in which he fulfilled the promise of his *Proposals* of 1756, with as many illustrations from the notes themselves as space permits, is all that a review such as this must be can reasonably attempt to do.

The edition needs to be rescued from the opprobrium which Macaulay and succeeding critics have cast upon it. It is true that Johnson's strength did not lie in minute textual criticism, and it is also true that he made many blunders in emendation and interpretation of difficult passages; but it is also true that his great common sense led him straight to the meaning in a hundred places where former editors had succeeded only in expending their energy in useless notes. The succinctness and entire clearness of his explanations, even when they prove wrong, make them models of their kind, of great value in the development of Shakespearean commentary. His severe training in lexicography had taught him to word his definitions in the clearest and briefest way, and not the least creditable feature of his work is the difficulty which present-day editors find in avoiding direct or indirect quotation of them.

Perhaps the emendations have proved the weakest part of the edition. An examination of Dr. Furness's Variorum *Richard III*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet*, three plays which I have chosen because of the peculiar difficulties existing between the quartos and the First Folio, shows comparatively few corrections of Warburton's text, which Johnson used as the basis of his own text, and of these still fewer have been adopted in any large degree by later editors. In *Richard III* he made twenty changes; and of these three are insertions of stage directions, one is the transposition of lines, one a conjecture that something has been omitted, one the making of a separate line of verse of a prose speech, and one the transference of a speech from the Archbishop to the Queen. Of the remaining thirteen, ten are purely unessential changes, such as any editor might make without materially altering the text. The three changes

which we have left really affect the meaning of the lines; but these have not been accepted by standard editions, neither the Globe Shakespeare (1881), the Arden Shakespeare, nor the recent Cambridge Shakespeare (1909), edited by Professor Neilson, having followed the suggestions. In but three instances has he been somewhat generally followed, and eight times his emendation has gone no further.

The other two plays fare somewhat better. *King Lear* has eighty-six emendations originating with Johnson. Sixteen have been accepted by certain of the succeeding editors, and the rest were adopted by one or two immediately following him or remained unaccepted by all. Seventeen of these consist of the introduction of stage directions, which, by the way, are usually sensibly made; twenty-four have to do with the arrangement of punctuation, which he considered wholly within his power; three are arrangements of lines; three are changes of speeches from prose to verse; and three are omissions of lines. Twenty-four of the remainder are unessential changes. Two of the last twelve have been accepted by the standard texts named above. The first changes *gate* to *gait* in the line,

> Methought thy very gait did prophesy
> A royal nobleness. (V, 3, 176.)

The other, though but a question of punctuation, is more important as revealing a feeling for the requirements of tragic emotion. The dying Lear, pointing to Cordelia dead in his arms, cries, "Look on her, — look, — her lips." (V, 3, 312.) This is a great advance over the "Look her lips" of F^1, or "Look on her lips" of all preceding texts.

Hamlet has seventy-eight changes of all kinds, seventeen of which have been pretty generally followed, and forty-five have found a resting-place in Johnson alone. Five are stage directions, seventeen are questions of punctuation, six have to do with the arrangement of lines, and three are arrangements of

lines as quotations or songs. Thirty-nine may be neglected as unessential, while but five are actual changes in meaning. One only of these five has been adopted by the standard editions. This is the change of *president* to *precedent* in the lines:

> I have a voice and precedent of peace,
> To keep my name ungor'd. (V, 2, 260.)

This enumeration, like all displays of mere statistics, is apt to mislead. Perhaps Johnson's chief value as an emendatory critic is his refusal to accept very many of the fantastic conjectures which are sprinkled so profusely throughout Warburton's pages. His sensible and conservative attitude toward the text he had announced in the *Preface*, and continually throughout the notes the reader runs across similar observations. After one attempt to remedy a line he frankly declares, "I know not what credit the reader will give to this emendation, which I do not much credit myself." [1] But it is usually in reply to Warburton's long-winded notes that he makes his most characteristic remarks. Once when Warburton would suppose a certain change in the text, Johnson bluntly observes, "I will not suppose it." In another place he says, "There is no end to such alterations; every page of a vehement and negligent writer will afford opportunities for changes of terms, if mere propriety will justify them." [2] In the same strain are his remark that elegance alone will not justify alteration, and his other sensible one: "If phraseology is to be changed as words grow uncouth by disuse, or gross by vulgarity, the history of every language will be lost; we shall no longer have the words of any authour; and, as these alterations will be often unskilfully made, we shall in time have very little of his meaning." [3] And the following gentle dig at the commentators deserves

1. *Midsummer Night's Dream*, II, 1, 101.
2. *King John*, III, 2, 1–3. See also *Measure for Measure*, II, 3, 11–12.
3. *As You Like It*, II, 7, 94–96. *Hamlet*, IV, 5, 84.

mention: "I wish every commentator, before he suffers his fancy to kindle, would repeat,

> We are all men,
> In our own natures frail, and capable
> Of frailty; few are angels."[1]

In the other half of an editor's work, that of interpretation and commentary, Johnson deserves both praise and blame. His adherence to certain narrow standards of criticism and his limitations of temperament prevented him in many ways from understanding and interpreting the poet, but his supreme common sense and judicial mind led him just as often to the true meaning of obscure passages and to a sounder appreciation than that of more enthusiastic devotees, who have tended to see their master through the medium of their own temperamental caprice.

His famous appreciation of Falstaff and his crew and his fine interpretation of the character of Polonius deserve to take rank beside Goethe's study of *Hamlet* or De Quincey's "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*," in the realm of appreciative criticism of character and situation. Not less sensible is his denial that Caliban ever spoke a new language; for, he declares, "let any other being entertain the same thoughts and he will find them easily issue in the same expressions." Indeed, his interpretation of character, as this was what primarily interested him in the work of the poet, is almost always just and illuminating.

His love for Shakespeare's comic scenes led him to recognize the supremely comic character of Falstaff's impersonation of King Henry and the uproarious fun of the contest between Katherine and Petruchio. As long as his sense of propriety did not receive offense, he was ready to enter into the spirit of the play.

Just as shrewd is his insight into the motives which impelled

1. *Henry VIII*, V, 3, 10–12.

the dramatist to neglect the final acts of some of his plays. The fifth act of *All's Well that Ends Well* met with particular criticism because he disliked the apportionment of rewards at the conclusion. Shakespeare, who was hastening to the end of the play, and finding sufficient material to fill up the remaining scenes, contracted his dialogue and precipitated his action. Johnson believed that "decency required that Bertram's double crime of cruelty and disobedience, joined likewise with some hypocrisy, should raise more resentment; and that though his mother might easily forgive him, his king should more pertinaciously vindicate his own authority and Helen's merit: of all this Shakespeare could not be ignorant, but Shakespeare wanted to conclude his play."

His appreciation of *King Lear*, while couched in conventional phrasing, shows true appreciation of the tremendous power of the play. He gives credit to its great dramatic power and the intensity and range of the passions exhibited. "The artful involutions of distinct interests, the striking opposition of contrary characters, the sudden changes of fortune, and the quick succession of events, fill the mind with a perpetual tumult of indignation, pity, and hope. There is no scene which does not contribute to the aggravation of the distress or conduct of the action, and scarce a line which does not conduce to the progress of the scene. So powerful is the current of the poet's imagination, that the mind, which once ventures within it, is hurried irresistibily along." Johnson's emotions must have responded with great intensity to the impression which the play made upon them, just as in his boyhood the speech of the ghost in *Hamlet* terrified him when he was alone.[1]

It is not possible to give anything like an adequate account of the explanations which he attempted of particular passages in the text; a few examples to illustrate his method must suffice. Johnson's respect for the text led him to seek explana-

1. *Bos.* I, 70.

tions of present readings rather than to rely on his conjectural ability, which he distrusted. "That there are two ways of setting right gives reason to suspect that there may be a third way better than either," [1] he had declared in examining one of Warburton's guesses. The latter he held in high esteem for his extensive learning and perhaps for the ingenuity of his notes. For this reason he has included a good many of them, one might think almost too many, in his own notes. But he realized that all of them were too long, some unnecessary and stupid, and a large proportion but displays of the remarkable ingenuity of the author. One of the distinct merits of Johnson's edition is this clearing away of useless lumber from Shakespearean criticism; in this respect he performed a necessary and valuable work and performed it well.

"A commentator naturally wishes to reject what he cannot understand," he remarked of one of Warburton's changes; and referring to another emendation, he declared that an author in revising his work after his original ideas have faded from his mind, and new observations have produced new sentiments, naturally introduces new and fresh images which may be incongruous to the main design.[2] These two statements, one expressing the temptation constantly before a conjectural critic, the other indicating causes and reasons for apparent corruptions, may be taken as the two checks which he put upon his own editing and in turn applied to that of his predecessor. He does not scruple to employ strong language in rejecting some of these notes, and "our learned commentator" is seldom spared through any undue reverence for his genius. And his comment is always brief and to the point. For example, he exclaims apropos of another exclamation by Warburton: "But why nonsense? Is anything more commonly said, than that beauties eclipse the sun? Both the old and

1. *Love's Labour's Lost*, I, 1, 92.
2. *All's Well*, I, 1, 179.

new readings are philosophical nonsense, but they are both, and both equally, poetical sense." Not always is he so gentle; the following is a good example of his usual manner: "It is strange that when the sense is so clear, any commentator should thus laboriously obscure it to introduce a new reading; and yet stranger that he should shew such confidence in his commentation as to insert it into the text." On another occasion he says: "I cannot perceive the second line to be intolerable, or to be nonsense. The speaker only rises in his ideas. She has all courtly parts, says he, more exquisite than any lady, than all ladies, than all womankind. Is this nonsense?" And finally, "I suppose the reader is long since contented to take either word than read the argument." [1] Here is once more the real Dr. Johnson, and followers of the old dogmatist may find many more such notes in almost any play of the edition.

A very few examples will suffice to illustrate his own explanations. Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be," has received detailed comment and the argument is traced in full. The note is too long for quotation, though it is one of the best of its kind, showing the skill in logical explanation which the author possessed. Kent's exhortation to King Lear to "reverse thy doom" receives the following comment: "I am inclined to think that *reverse thy doom* was Shakespeare's first reading, as more apposite to the present occasion, and that he changed it afterwards to *reserve thy state*, which conduces more to the general progress of the action." [2] In the same play we have a suitable and proper explanation of the lines:

> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
> That slaves your ordinance . . .

"The language of Shakespeare is very licentious, and his words have often meanings remote from the proper and original use. To slave or beslave another is to treat him with

1. *Romeo and Juliet*, I, 2, 25. *Cymbeline*, III, 5, 71. 2. *King Lear*, I, 1, 151.

terms of indignity; in a kindred sense, to slave the ordinance, may be, to slight or ridicule it." [1] The comment on the following lines is fairly typical of Johnson's explanations (*All's Well*, I, 2, 38):

> So like a courtier, no Contempt or Bitterness
> Were in his Pride or Sharpness; or if they were,
> His Equal had awaked them.

"He was so like a courtier, that there was in his dignity of manner nothing contemptuous, and in his keenness of wit nothing bitter. If bitterness or contemptuousness ever appeared, they had been awakened by some injury, not of a man below him, but of his Equal. This is the complete image of a well-bred man, and somewhat like this Voltaire has exhibited his hero Louis XIV."

Of the line,

> Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile

(*Love's Labour's Lost*, I, 1, 77), he has this to say, "The whole sense of this jingling declamation is only this, that a man by too close study may read himself blind, which might have been told with less obscurity in fewer words."

Not the least important part of his comments is the numerous reflections and observations on life scattered throughout the edition. Johnson's professed interest in human nature and his consciousness of a mission as a moralist make his incidental reflections always good reading and often full of illuminating criticism. For example, he cannot reconcile himself to Bertram in *All's Well*, "a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate: when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness."

1. *King Lear*, I, 1, 151; IV, 1, 70–71.

This is just criticism upon a very disagreeable play. The degree of his appreciation of the truth of Shakespeare's characterizations and the justness of his observations upon life can be illustrated from his many recurring remarks concerning the import of certain passages. When Don Juan in *Much Ado About Nothing* declares, "I cannot hide what I am," the critic says, "This is one of our author's natural touches. An envious and unsocial mind, too proud to give pleasure, and too sullen to receive it, always endeavours to hide its malignity from the world and from itself, under the plainness of simple honesty, or the dignity of haughty independence."[1] Another characteristic remark occurs in the same play (IV, 1, 251–52):

> LEONATO: . . . Being that I flow in grief,
> The smallest twine may lead me.

"This is one of our author's observations on life. Men overpowered with distress eagerly listen to the first offers of relief, close with every scheme, and believe every promise. He that has no longer any confidence in himself, is glad to repose his trust in any other that will undertake to guide him." When Constance (*King John*, III, 4, 99–100) says,

> Had you such a loss as I,
> I could give better comfort,

Johnson observes that this is a statement which great sorrow always dictates. "Whoever cannot help himself casts his eyes on others for assistance, and often mistakes their inability for coldness." One other reflection is to be found in *Richard II* (I, 3, 227–28):

> GAUNT: Shorten my days thou canst with sullen sorrow,
> And pluck nights from me, but not lend a morrow.

"It is matter of very melancholy consideration, that all human advantages confer more power of doing evil than good."

1. *Much Ado*, I, 3, 14.

These reflections, which are most inadequately presented when taken out of their context, being the reaction of a man whose emotional experience had been strong and deep, upon the work of another man possessed of unsurpassed powers of expressing a profound knowledge of human life, are singularly refreshing to the student, not only for their self-revelation but also for their wise interpretation of literature. It is not surprising then to find Johnson enjoying the sententiousness of *Love's Labour's Lost* or seeing "something very striking and solemn" in the soliloquy of Henry V the night before the battle of Agincourt. "Something like this, on less occasions, every breast has felt. Reflection and seriousness rush upon the mind upon the separation of a gay company, and especially after forced and unwilling merriment." Such notes go far toward interpreting great scenes.

It is also true, however, that the editor's moral bias is sometimes attended with results not so happy. He thinks, for example, that Shakespeare, by hastening to the end of his work in *As You Like It*, "suppressed the dialogue between the usurper and the hermit, and lost an opportunity of exhibiting a moral lesson in which he might have found matter worthy of his highest powers." The moral to be drawn from the exhibition of Falstaff is, "that no man is more dangerous than he who, with a will to corrupt, hath the power to please; and that neither wit nor honesty ought to think themselves safe with such a companion when they see Henry seduced by Falstaff." He can even say: "Juliet plays most of her pranks under the appearance of religion; perhaps Shakespeare meant to punish her hypocrisy." [1]

This kind of criticism would not be acceptable to-day, though the literary convention which gave it birth gives a better excuse for it than there is to be found for the romantic moralizing of some writers of ethical criticism.

1. *Romeo and Juliet*, IV, 3, 3–4.

As might be expected in a man of Johnson's somewhat conventionally religious nature, he wishes there had been less of profaneness in the carousal between Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch. He observes of the *Merry Wives of Windsor* that its great fault is its profanity which is not justified by any necessity of preserving character, adding that there are higher laws than those of criticism. He objects to the expression, "So wish I, I might thrust thy soul to hell," as a horrid oath, and for the same reason finds fault with Hamlet's desire to send the King to hell with his sins upon his head. "This speech, in which Hamlet, represented as a virtuous character, is not content with taking blood for blood, but contrives damnation for the man that he would punish, is too horrible to be read or to be uttered." [1]

One bit of self-revelation, that shows the man of feeling struggling against his better judgment, is his defense of poetic justice at the end of his notes to *King Lear*. This is the more blameworthy as it goes contrary to the rules of Aristotle and all the sense of the ancients. To quote: "A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry, may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life; but since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded that the observation of justice makes a play worse; or, that if other excellences are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of virtue." Ten years later, when no longer too much persuaded by his sympathy for Cordelia, he could admit, in the *Life of Rowe*, that the poet's duty is to depict prosperous wickedness, because such is often the case in real life, and poetry is but an imitation of reality, a mirror of life.

The principal defects of which Johnson's edition is guilty are too close an adherence to narrow principles of judgment, too strong a tendency to rationalize poetical diction, and certain

1. *2 Henry VI*, IV, 10, 84. See also *Henry V*, VII, 2, 82. *Hamlet*, III, 3, 94–95.

temperamental limitations which prevented the editor from fully understanding the imaginative and poetical qualities of the plays. A glance at each of these in turn will conclude the chapter.

The most glaring lapses into neo-classical dogmatism and terminology occur in what he labelled the short comments which he appended to the plays. These unfortunate comments betray him as nothing else could do. It is true that the desire for brevity led him often to summarize the faults and beauties of a play in the accepted fashion of the day; but just as often he condemned a play in a purely dogmatic way, asserting his views roundly and without proper proof. Thus in *Love's Labour's Lost* there are many passages "mean, childish, and vulgar; and some which ought not to have been exhibited, as we are told they were, to a maiden queen." *Richard II* cannot be said "much to affect the passions or enlarge the understanding," and some parts of *Richard III* are trifling, others shocking, and some improbable. Of *Cymbeline* he says: "To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation." It may be surmised that this most outrageously romantic of all the poet's plays would not easily appeal to Johnson's orderly mind. Of *Hamlet* he says: "The poet is accused of having shewn little regard to poetic justice, and may be charged with equal neglect of poetical probability. The apparition left the regions of the dead to little purpose; the revenge which he demands is not obtained but by the death of him that was required to take it; and the gratification which would arise from the destruction of an usurper and a murderer, is abated by the untimely death of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious." But perhaps his worst offense against taste occurs in his stricture upon *Macbeth:* "This play is deservedly

celebrated for the propriety of its fictions, and solemnity, grandeur, and variety of its action; but it has no nice discriminations of character, the events are too great to admit the influence of particular dispositions, and the course of the action necessarily determines the conduct of the agents.

"The danger of ambition is well described, and I know not whether it may not be said in defence of some parts which now seem improbable, that, in Shakespeare's time, it was necessary to warn credulity against vain and illusive predictions.

"The passions are directed to their true end. Lady Macbeth is merely detested; and though the courage of Macbeth preserves some esteem, yet every reader rejoices at his fall."

This stricture, embodying as it does almost every one of the crying evils of neo-classical criticism, is of course an extreme case. Nearly all the others, even those just cited, contain a good deal of carefully reasoned praise, expressed briefly but sincerely. Notable among these latter might be mentioned those upon *Measure for Measure*, *Coriolanus*, and, with one or two reservations, *Twelfth Night*. But it needs to be emphasized that Johnson, with his strict classical training, would scarcely be the critic to give full homage to the great Gothic genius in whose plays the mighty passions of men are displayed in their utmost intensity and their utmost dispersion. To what extent we shall condemn his opinions will depend largely upon how we ourselves regard the great English playwright. Somewhere between the conservative humanism of Johnson and the romantic mouthings of Swinburne we may perhaps find a position satisfying to the modern critical spirit.

A good many examples of his pseudo-classical blunders could be cited; a few must suffice. He says of the lines in *Measure for Measure* (III, 1, 17–19):

> Thy best of rest is sleep,
> And that thou oft provok'st; yet grossly fear'st
> Thy death, which is no more,

"Here Dr. Warburton might have found a sentiment worthy of his animadversion. I cannot without indignation find Shakespeare saying, that death is only sleep, lengthening out his exhortation by a sentence which in the Friar is impious, in the reasoner is foolish, and in the poet trite and vulgar." He notes that Shakespeare by mentioning the use of pistols in *I Henry IV* takes no care to preserve the manners of the time; and he elsewhere asserts that the poet deserts the manners of the time in which his drama is placed, without necessity or advantage, the occasion being the mention of a rapier, which was not seen in England till two centuries after the period of *Richard II*. King Henry V prays like a Christian and swears like a heathen, just as King Lear shows himself too much of a mythologist. Of the line, "Now speak we on our cue," he makes the illuminating remark that it is a phrase which the author learned among players and has imparted to kings. In like manner, he animadverts on the last scene of *Henry V* (V, 2) as "a mean dialogue for princes; the merriment is very gross, and the sentiments are very worthless." He thinks the scene between Katherine and her maid (*Henry V*, III, 4) is mean enough, and he takes particular pains to express his prejudice against the French. "Throughout the whole scene there may be found French servility and French vanity." And, finally, he observes: "It may be remarked that Hamlet, in his enumeration of miseries, forgets, whether properly or not, that he is a prince, and mentions many evils to which only inferior stations are exposed."

In agreement with the opinion expressed in the *Preface*, he declared that Shakespeare could not long maintain the pathetic. At the end of *Romeo and Juliet* he notes that his persons, however distressed, have a conceit left in their misery, a miserable conceit. He was glad that the speech of Constance (*King John*, III, 4, 61) had been interrupted, because a passion so violent could not be borne long. "Shakespeare," he says in

another place, "is very apt to deviate from the pathetic to the ridiculous. Had the speech of Richard (*Richard II*, III, 3, 155–57) ended at this line it had exhibited the language of submissive misery, conforming its intention to the present fortune, and calmly ending its purposes in death." He of course misinterprets the peculiarly sentimental character the poet had bestowed on the deposed king. On the lines,

> Throw my heart
> Against the flint and hardness of my fault,

Johnson makes this comment: "The pathetic of Shakespeare too often ends in the ridiculous. It is painful to find the gloomy dignity of this noble scene destroyed by the intrusion of a conceit so far-fetched and unaffecting." [1]

No doubt the Elizabethan stock conceit rightly seemed to the reasonable eighteenth-century mind a quite inexcusable blot on poetic diction, and particularly did this seem so to the man who was to become the author of the *Life of Cowley*. As tastes change, these external ornaments lose their value to men of another generation. Such a jingle as "England shall double gild his treble guilt" must have been intolerable to Dr. Johnson's mind, and he took the manly way of condemning its use. One may add, too, that even to-day, when our standards of propriety seem to be disappearing, it is like a good tonic to read this unyielding defense of correct poetical diction, though most of it may appear to us a little bit stiff in the joints.

Johnson's deficient knowledge of the peculiarities of Elizabethan English sometimes led him far astray in his explanations. Such combinations as *too wilful-blame* and *earthlier happy* gave his grammatical sense a good deal of trouble and gave rise to some tolerably skilful guessing. Of the first he has this sensible conjecture: "This is a mode of speech with which I am not acquainted. Perhaps it might be read too wilful-

1. *Antony and Cleopatra*, IV, 9, 15–16.

blunt or too wilful-bent, or thus, 'Indeed, my lord, you are to blame, too wilful.'" Likewise, he makes a shrewd guess at the meaning of the second: "Thus all the copies, yet earthlier is so harsh a word, and earthlier-happy for happier-earthly a mode of speech so unusual, that I wonder none of the editors have proposed earlier-happy." [1]

In one other respect Johnson's position as a purely academic critic, who judged of dramatic literature from his knowledge of dramatic theory, without much insight into stage conditions or stage history, led him to criticize certain defects of the plays without assigning a proper reason for them. Thus the dialogue in the last act of *All's Well* is too long, "since the audience already knew the whole transaction; nor is there any reason for puzzling the king and playing with his passions; but it was much easier than to make a pathetical interview between Helen and her husband, her mother, and the king." Thus, also, the speech of Rumour (*2 Henry IV*) "is not inelegant or unpoetical, but is wholly useless, since we are told nothing which the first scene does not clearly and naturally discover. The only end of such prologues is to inform the audience of some facts previous to the action, of which they can have no knowledge from the persons of the drama." A little more expert knowledge of Elizabethan stage conditions would have revealed to him the insistent demand of the audience, who could only through the spoken word comprehend action and situation, that the story be retold and reëmphasized until they had absorbed it to the last detail. Every drama, including the Greek, acquires its own technique adapted to special conditions of stage and audience and fits ill the requirements of another set of stage conditions.

In his explanations of poetic imagery his habit of analyzing figures led him into the same kind of errors which have made his *Life of Gray* the object of attack for a century. Of the lines:

1. *1 Henry IV*, III, 1, 177. *Midsummer Night's Dream*, I, 1, 76.

Lest zeal now melted by the windy breath
Of soft petitions, pity and remorse,
Cool and congeal again to what it was,

he observes, "We have here a very unusual, and, I think, not very just image of *zeal*, which in its highest degree is represented by others as a flame, but by Shakespeare as a frost. To *repress zeal*, in the language of others, is to *cool*, in Shakespeare's to *melt* it; when it exerts its utmost power it is commonly said to *flame*, but by Shakespeare to be congealed." [1] Again, in *King John* (I, 1, 24–26), when the King says,

Be thou as lightning in the eyes of France,
For e'er thou canst report I will be there,
The thunder of my cannon shall be heard,

Johnson remarks: "The simile does not suit well: the lightning indeed appears before the thunder is heard, but the lightning is destructive and the thunder innocent." Another good example of this habit of rationalizing imagery occurs in his notes on *Henry V* (III, 5, 50–52):

Rush on his host, as doth the melted snow
Upon the vallies, whose low vassal seat
The Alp doth spit and void his rheum upon.

Johnson: "The poet has defeated himself by passing too soon from one image to another. To bid the French rush upon the English as the torrents from melted snow from the Alps, was at once vehement and proper, but its force is destroyed by the grossness of the thought in the next line." In *Hamlet* (IV, 7, 20–21) he criticizes the following simile:

Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone,
Convert his gyves to graces.

Johnson: "This simile is neither very seasonable in the deep interest of the conversation, nor very accurately applied If

1. *King John*, II, 1, 244–46.

the spring had changed base metals to gold, the thought had been more proper."

We cannot in truth call all of this, or perhaps any great part of it, bad criticism except again by taking into consideration some of the things the critic might have said and did not say. No doubt, had Johnson been able to impress his views upon the great poet when he wrote, Shakespeare would have pruned his excesses and become our great classic and perpetual model of perfect poetry, but it is also true that if someone had played the Boileau to Shakespeare the poet would thereby have lost much of his supreme imaginative power. It is futile to wish that a great age of literature had been otherwise than it was; and therefore any attempt to criticize the poetry of the age of Elizabeth as one would the verse of the Restoration must be inadequate. Johnson recognized Shakespeare's superabundant genius and ascribed these mixed figures to their true cause; but he did not fully enough realize that, if the poet could create the proper receptivity in the minds of the audience (his poetry, be it remembered, being always to be spoken) for his ideas, he was content to neglect the finished accuracy of their expression.

Many others of Johnson's comments, which betray the critical school to which he belonged, are rather amusing than blameworthy. Viola's exclamation, "O, that I served that lady," etc., leads him to say, "Viola seems to have formed a very deep design with very little premeditation. She is thrown by shipwreck on an unknown coast, hears that the prince is a bachelor, and resolves to supplant the lady whom he courts." And when she says, "I'll serve this Duke," he remarks, "Viola is an excellent schemer, never at a loss; if she cannot serve the lady, she will serve the Duke." This is excellent common sense and of course good criticism if we do not ask our critic to put himself into emotional sympathy with the romantic character

of the play. Similarly he seems not clearly to comprehend the situation when he discovers that Juliet's equivocations are rather too artful for a mind disturbed by the loss of a new lover.

Johnson's temperamental limitations may be dismissed by a word or two. He lacked an ear for Shakespeare's melody, and he often blundered in consequence, as when he declared that the songs of *The Tempest* had no "supernatural dignity or elegance." His criticism of Edgar's description of Dover Cliff is worth extended quotation: "He that looks from a precipice finds himself assailed by one great and dreadful image of irresistible destruction. But this overwhelming idea is dissipated and enfeebled the instant that the mind can restore itself to the observation of particulars, and diffuse its attention to distinct objects. The enumeration of the choughs and crows, the samphire-man and the fishers, counteracts the great effect of the prospect, as it peoples the desert of intermediate vacuity, and stops the mind in the rapidity of its descent through emptiness and horrour." This elaborate abstract reasoning might have been spared if he had possessed knowledge and visualizing power enough to perceive that Edgar must impress his description not only upon his blind father but upon the audience itself.

In this connection must not be forgotten Boswell's famous account of the Doctor's assertion that nothing in Shakespeare equals the description of the temple in Congreve's *The Mourning Bride*. In defending this statement he was constrained to say: "Sir, this is not comparing Congreve on the whole, with Shakespeare on the whole; but only maintaining that Congreve has one finer passage than any thing that can be found in Shakespeare. Sir, a man may not have more than ten guineas in the world, but he may have those ten guineas in one piece; and so may have a finer piece than a man who has ten thousand pounds: but then he has only one ten-guinea piece. What I mean is, that you can shew me no passage where

there is simply a description of material objects, without any admixture of moral notions, which produces such an effect." [1]

That a critic should think of choosing the highly wrought lines of Congreve in preference to the rich offering of Shakespeare, even though, as here, he did so purely for the sake of teasing his friends, proves in what school of criticism he had been trained.[2] Similarly, Rymer's comparison of various night scenes in literature, preferring Dryden's in *The Indian Emperor*, suggested the same kind of thing to Johnson in *Macbeth*, a comparison which he succeeded not ineffectively in working out.

In spite of defects of taste and judgment, the contribution which Johnson has made to Shakespearean scholarship yet remains considerable. He judged as a man of his century must inevitably have judged a great poet, whose mind and temperament were so foreign to his own. In view of this fact, it is hardly fair to hold him to a standard which a century of progress in criticism has set. Is it not rather more fitting to ask what advances he made over already existing editions of the poet? If he had not worked, would it not have been necessary for some other to brush away the foolish notes which Warburton in his self-confidence felt it incumbent on himself to write? If as an editor Johnson succeeded in destroying some of the absurd notions of previous commentators and, furthermore, showed himself possessed of extraordinary aptitude for clear explanation and sensible remark, these qualifications can at least go far toward recovering his edition from the contempt which later editors and critics have cast upon it.

1. *Bos.* II, 86.

2. See *Misc.* I, 186. Mrs. Piozzi: "[Johnson] told me, how he used to teize Garrick by commendations of the tomb scene in Congreve's Mourning Bride, protesting that Shakespeare had in the same line of excellence nothing as good: 'All which is strictly *true* (said he); but that is no reason for supposing Congreve is to stand in competition with Shakespeare: these fellows know not how to blame, nor how to commend.' "

CHAPTER VIII

Johnson's Relation to Contemporary Literary and Social Movements

JOHNSON has so long stood as the great Tory in criticism that any study of what we may call incipient romanticism in his writings would seem to be almost superfluous. Had he not, forsooth, gone on record as the worst of critics by that most outrageous of all criticisms, the *Life of Gray?* Was he not blind to the beauties of Shakespeare? Had he not proved himself utterly devoid of taste in his attack on *Lycidas?* Can anyone, in short, excuse his numerous critical blunders on any grounds other than stark insensibility to all that we think of as poetry? But to those of us who know and love him well enough to relish even his absurdities, he stands for much more than can be briefly expressed. We know, for example, that he stands for solid learning, for huge common sense, for mental and moral discipline, for hatred of all falseness and sham. We feel that a man of Johnson's comprehensive soul does not permit himself to be circumscribed by a particular school of criticism. If in general he remains the expositor of neo-classic ideals, it is just as true that his rough manners concealed an emotional nature of unusual richness and power.

As we turn to consider his relation to contemporary movements, we should make an effort to understand the sentimental revolt that was under way against literary artificiality and conventionalized literary expression, and that was gradually undermining the hold of the older culture upon the people. This reaction from things as they were gathered headway during the years following Johnson's death, and issued in a

period of emotional expansion which is usually called the Romantic Movement.

To invent an exact and comprehensive definition of anything so elusive as the word romanticism which would satisfy every reader, is a task quite beyond the ordinary person's power. For present purposes we may at least accept Matthew Arnold's identification of the sentimental (which may for our purposes be also called the romantic) with a "readiness to react from the despotism of fact," and cite Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" as the manner in which the romantic mood is inclined to express itself. In essence the difference between the romantic nature and the reasonable eighteenth-century habit of mind lies in this very tendency to turn away from the disturbing roughness of actuality, and to seek in the conscious cultivation of the individual emotions for balm to the bruised spirit. This subjective habit was to result during the next century in the Tower of Ivory into which the beautiful uncomprehended soul might retire when too tormented by the hardness of the world. At any time it means a domination over conduct and action by the emotional nature and usually involves petty discontent with small things, and a search for novelty in order to gratify a desire for change.

Toward these various phases of life Johnson's attitude was entirely clear. He was a man clinging to old doctrines and old customs, and seeing in the gradual change of points of view one of the grave dangers to established institutions. He accepted the orthodox creed as the basis of his religious faith; a confirmed Tory in politics, he opposed the American rebellion and disliked Americans; and in literature he in the main upheld established principles. His position in the eighteenth century is to a considerable degree that of the humanist recognizing in the accumulated experience of the past the best foundation for a judgment of the present, often leaning too far

backward in his endeavor to walk straight. His own painful struggle to emerge from poverty had deepened in him the intense but somewhat rigid emotions with which nature had endowed him. His life in a garret as hack-writer for the booksellers, and his long years of toil on the *Dictionary*, had not tended to instil in his mind those complacent fallacies about the essential goodness of human nature, the beauty of virtue, or the harmony of natural laws, which Shaftesbury found so easy of utterence. That he did rise from his early miserable existence with as tolerant a view of human nature as he had reflects a world of credit on his innate sense of values. But the iron had entered his soul, and he approached questions of human conduct in the light of a terrible experience, which enabled him to penetrate into human motives with sureness and understanding. Vividly conscious of the pettiness of our lives and the narrow limits of human knowledge, he was content to leave the mystery of final causes to a power higher than his; for God's purposes are inscrutable, and man's aim in this earthly existence should be to seek laws by which he may prepare himself to meet the divine mercy. Hence Johnson's deep interest in moral laws and his continual enunciation of precepts through which he might aid his fellow men in their preparation for eternity.

His two imitations of Juvenal, composed while he was still under the stress of poverty, were the clearest expressions of temperamental pessimism which had yet been uttered in English poetry, giving classic form to the author's sense of the futility of human endeavor and the nothingness of life's offerings. His two periodicals, the *Rambler*, published 1750–52, during his work on the *Dictionary*, and the later *Idler*, 1758–60, the papers of which were written after Johnson had ceased from his labors and was beginning to sink into a dangerous contentment, reflect the sombre view which he habitually took of human life and conduct. As one turns the pages of

these ponderous volumes, one feels that behind the massive style and stately presentation of precept and example there existed a profoundly serious nature expressing the results of a very real experience. Moral truths, enforced by precept and example, are their chief content. The very titles of these eighteenth-century homilies indicate their author's motive in writing. A few citations will suffice: (*R.* 28) The various arts of self-delusion; (32) Necessity of patience; (7) Retirement natural to a great mind; (175) The majority are wicked; (192) Love unsuccessful without riches; (89) Luxury of a vain imagination; etc. A brief paragraph from the last of these deserves quotation. "But study requires solitude, and solitude is a state dangerous to those who are too much accustomed to sink into themselves. . . . It happens, indeed, that these hypocrites of learning are in time detected, and convinced by disgrace and disappointment of the difference between the labour of thought and the sport of musing. But this discovery is not often made till it is too late to recover the time that has been fooled away." "The labour of thought and the sport of musing." What better illustration do we need of the vast difference between the disciplined mind and the mind that is accustomed to yield itself to romantic reverie?

Perhaps the most characteristic expression of Johnson's views is to be found in *Rasselas*, written in 1759 in the evenings of one week to pay the expenses of his mother's funeral. Unlike *Candide*, Voltaire's contemporary performance, the pessimism of this little homily did not strike at the roots of religion and morality, but the fact of human misery was stated as something to be faced without questioning God's ultimate purposes. In the conclusion, "in which nothing is concluded," the Pilgrims return to the Happy Valley, there to prepare as best they may to meet the approach of death. "To me," said the Princess, "choice of life is become less important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity."

Johnson's love of truth and his own patient endurance of his lot made him look upon the complaints of the man of feeling as hardly more than expressions of common cant. "I hate a complainer," he once exclaimed.[1] When Mrs. Thrale was lamenting the death of a cousin in America he cried: "Prithee, my dear, have done with canting: how would the world be worse for it, I may ask, if all your relations were at once spitted like larks, and roasted for Presto's [her lap dog's] supper?" [2] "These are the distresses of sentiment," he said on another occasion, "which a man who is really to be pitied has no leisure to feel. The sight of people who want food and raiment is so common in great cities, that a surly fellow like me has no compassion to spare for wounds given only to vanity or softness." [3] That the poor and the busy had no leisure for sentimental sorrow,[4] was his comment upon his friends who were too feeling for his rugged nature. His explanation of this apparent insensibility to the distresses of others is contained in the following comment on unrestrained emotions: "You will find these very feeling people are not very ready to do you good. They *pay* you by *feeling*." [5]

In this one sentence Johnson has forever revealed to us the paradox of the sentimentalist. And yet his romantic, and, to some men, ridiculous, love for his "Dear Tetty," and the pathetic prayers he composed on the anniversaries of her death, which he always kept with fasting, are testimony to the deep underlying tenderness of his nature. Far too few of his friends penetrated beneath the rough exterior to find the warmth and sympathy really there.

It is evident enough, then, that he did not look with a great deal of complacency upon the facile attempts of the Pope-

1. *Misc.* II, 140. 2. *Ibid.* I, 189.

3. *Ibid.* I, 206. See also *Bos.* II, 469. "Sir, it is affectation to pretend to feel the distresses of others, as much as they do themselves. It is equally so, as if one should pretend to feel as much pain while a friend's leg is cutting off, as he does."

4. *Misc.* I, 252. 5. *Bos.* II, 95.

Shaftesbury school of morality to explain away the misery of the world. In the *Life of Pope* he reduces the poet's fine phrases to their original commonplaces, shows their want of novelty, and proves the feebleness of their application.[1] Neither did he endure the self-assured ease with which the advocates of a mechanical universe attempted to account for the world of things as they are. His review of Soame Jenyns's *Free Inquiry Into the Nature and Origins of Evil* remains one of the most vigorous denunciations of naturalistic pessimism ever penned. "The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it: how will either of those be put more in our power by him who tells us that we are puppets, of which some creature not much wiser than ourselves manages the wires!" "That a set of beings," he says, "unseen and unheard, are hovering about us, trying experiments upon our sensibility, putting us in agonies, to see our limbs quiver; torturing us to madness, that they may laugh at our vagaries; sometimes obstructing the bile, that they may see how a man looks, when he is yellow; sometimes breaking a traveller's bones, to try how he will get home; sometimes wasting a man to a skeleton, and sometimes killing him fat, for the greater elegance of his hide."

Johnson's conservative spirit looked askance at the "modernism" which was finding its home across the Channel. Indeed, so very conservative was he whenever he perceived anything destructive of social institutions, that he could feel that change of any sort was of doubtful value. Novelty and innovation were, he thought, in fact tending to break down the

1. *Lives*, III, 243. "Never were penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised. The reader feels his mind full, though he learns nothing; and when he meets it in its new array no longer knows the talk of his mother and his nurse. When these wonder-working sounds sink into sense and the doctrine of the *Essay*, disrobed of its ornaments, is left to the powers of its naked excellence, what shall we discover?" Then follows a paragraph, too long to quote, of vigorous analysis, in which Pope's couplets are indeed stripped of their ornaments and laid bare before the reader.

barriers of society as it was then constituted; most schemes of improvement were at best laughable things, and Tyburn itself was not safe from its fury.[1] This is quite in line with his claim that whenever a new book appeared he read an old one.

So he inevitably looked upon Rousseau and his finespun theories about the corruption of civilized society as dangerous to the very existence of the established order. "Rousseau," he cried, "is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation, than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations."[2] He was a rascal to be hunted out of society; one who knew he was talking nonsense and laughed at the world for staring at him. He and all those who dealt in paradoxes were led away by a childish desire for novelty.[3] And the humanist fights his losing battle against the coming revolution, scarcely realizing — as how could he? — the tremendous significance for the future of the new forces that were then gathering headway.

Of professions of liberty and equality he was profoundly sceptical, anticipating in his judgments in a really wonderful way the aberrations of more than a century of democratic strivings. But he goes far in his opposition to the assertion of the mob spirit, and anything undermining subordination was to his mind dangerous in the extreme; hence his dislike not only of Rousseau but of the demagogue Wilkes. In writing of Akenside's "zeal for liberty" he defines certain manifestations of this quality as a "zeal which sometimes disguises from the world, and not rarely from the mind which it possesses, an envious desire of plundering wealth or degrading greatness; and of which the immediate tendency is innovation and anarchy, an impetuous eagerness to subvert and confound, with very little care what shall be established."[4] This observation

1. *Bos.* II, 102; IV, 188.
2. *Ibid.* II, 12.
3. *Ibid.* II, 74; I, 441.
4. *Lives*, III, 411.

is as true today as it ever was in the days preceding the French Revolution; even to a greater degree, if we would measure the power of an idea by the destruction it has caused, in connection with the tragic career of the Bolsheviki in Russia.

His opinions on the various subjects of sentimental enthusiasm show how very far away his accustomed thinking was from that point of view. First of all, his opinion of sentimental virtue, that innate purity of soul, contact with which will reform the hardened rake and bring tears of repentance to the eyes of the confirmed sinner. Of books which exalt this type of virtue he has expressed his contempt. "Narrations of romantick and impracticable virtue will be read with wonder, but that which is unattainable is recommended in vain: that good may be endeavoured it must be shewn to be possible." [1] Mr. Seward, in his *Anecdotes of Distinguished Persons*, II, 461, tells how Johnson used to advise his friends to be on their guard against romantic virtue, as being founded on no settled principle. "A plank," he said, "that is tilted up at one end must of course fall down on the other." [2] Principles founded on right living were, in his opinion, the proper guides to conduct and the only sure way to true virtue.

For the central doctrine of natural affection, savage nobility, and the equality of man he ever expressed his hearty scorn. Once when Boswell was arguing for the existence of natural affection, he exclaimed, "Sir, natural affection is nothing: but affection from principle and established duty is sometimes wonderfully strong." And as one of the company contended that a hen will feed her chickens in preference to herself, he broke out: "But we don't know that the hen is hungry; let the hen be fairly hungry, and I 'll warrant she 'll peck the corn herself." . . . Boswell: "But some of the Indians have affection." Johnson: "Sir, that they help some of their children is plain; for some of them live, which they could not do with-

1. *Lives*, III, 173. 2. *Bos.* VI, xlix.

out being helped."[1] Pity, to his mind, was not natural to man, and children were always cruel. "We may have uneasy sensations from seeing a creature in distress, without pity; for we have not pity unless we wish to relieve them."[2] This remark is the best possible criticism of the sentimental character.

Upon the subject of savage happiness he was equally emphatic. "Do not allow yourself, Sir," he said to Boswell the sentimentalist, "to be imposed upon by such gross absurdity. It is sad stuff; it is brutish. If a bull could speak, he might as well exclaim, — 'Here am I with this cow and this grass; what being can enjoy greater felicity?'"[3] The great talker, who loved to fold his legs and have out his talk, appears in the following scornful remark, "Now what a wretch must he be, who is content with such conversation as can be had among savages." He maintained too that, were we all on an equality, we should have no other enjoyment than mere animal pleasure.[4]

His contempt for the sentimental attack on the evils of luxury led him rather far in its defense. The dread of it was visionary; no nation was ever hurt by it; even much good follows in its wake in the shape of improvements and conveniences.[5] This is doubtless bad political economy, but from Johnson's particular angle it was common sense. He may have had the *Deserted Village* of his friend Goldsmith in mind when he made these remarks. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the poet Crabbe brought his poem *The Village* to Johnson for correction, a poem admittedly written as a direct reply to Goldsmith.[6]

It is not to be supposed, however, that a man of large intellectual and emotional nature shall be any one thing with entire

1. *Bos.* IV, 210.
2. *Ibid.* I, 437.
3. *Ibid.* II, 228.
4. *Ibid.* I, 442.
5. *Ibid.* II, 170; III, 56.
6. *Ibid.* IV, 175.

consistency; it is enough that his views shall predominantly be taken from one position and not stray too far from it. His departure from common sense in his acceptance of Nahum Tate's remaking of *King Lear* is the most notorious example of his emotions running away with his critical judgment. This lapse into sentimentalism, leading him straight into the deepest of neo-classical pits, quite contrary to the spirit of Aristotle, was no doubt due to his strong sympathy for Cordelia and his pious wish to see virtue triumphant. That this defense of poetic justice was but a lapse is made evident by a restatement of tragic law in the *Life of Rowe*, quoted in the last chapter.

He once said to Mrs. Sheridan, mother of the dramatist, and author of a novel entitled *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, which Boswell describes as the journal of an amiable and pious heroine, who goes to her grave unrelieved, but resigned and full of hope of Heaven's mercy: "I know not, Madam, that you have a right, upon moral principles, to make your readers suffer so much." This novel, indeed, like most of its kind of the period, is sentimental only in its tender overflow of emotion, and could easily appeal to a man of Johnson's consciously moral nature. He knew and liked Mrs. Sheridan, and perhaps complimented her for that reason.[1]

Far more important, however, is his attitude toward the two great novelists, Richardson and Fielding. The former, it must be remembered, was a personal friend, having served him on more than one occasion when he was in pecuniary distress. His preference for Richardson's art lies in the fact that his minute study of the heart was in Johnson's view of greater importance than Fielding's immensely more vital creations, which he refused to understand. To his mind there was more knowledge of the heart revealed in one letter of Richardson than in all of *Tom Jones;* there was, again, as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was

1. *Bos.* I, 390.

made and a man who could tell the hour by looking on a dial plate.[1] These are but criticisms of their artistic value, but there can be hardly a question that the judgment was founded on moral grounds. Johnson wilfully turned from the "barren rascal" and the "blockhead," who had so violently shocked his moral sense.[2]

How far Johnson was willing to allow himself to approve of Richardson's moral teachings can be ascertained from one or two quotations from Boswell. He was an author "who has enlarged the knowledge of human nature, and taught the passions to move at the command of virtue." [3] At the same time, with his usual insight, the critic was able to point out the real merit of Richardson's work: "Why, sir, if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment." [4] This is a just remark, and indicates the reason why *Clarissa Harlowe*, at least, in spite of its great length, still finds readers even among those of an unsentimental nature.

An explanation of Johnson's inclination for Richardson's sentiment may be found in one of the papers of the *Rambler* (4), written while interest in this new literary form was yet fresh. By 1750 enough imitations of the story of the sentimental heroine in distress had appeared for Johnson to be able to describe them as exhibitions of life in its true state, "diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind." He terms this departure the comedy of romance and wishes to apply to it the rules of comic poetry. But because these narrations are written for the young, the ignorant, and the idle, for those uninformed by ex-

1. *Bos.* II, 173–74; 49.
2. *Ibid.* II, 173.
3. *Ibid.* I, 203. See also II, 49.
4. *Ibid.* II, 173.

perience, the author's task should be not merely to present the most perfect idea of virtue, but so to display vice as always to disgust, that the young may not receive any moral corruption from the splendor of successful wickedness. "It is to be steadily inculcated, that virtue is the highest proof of understanding, and the only solid basis of greatness; and that vice is the natural consequence of narrow thoughts; that it begins in mistake and ends in ignominy."

All this is almost exclusively moral. The author cannot forget his mission as preceptor of the English middle class, never realizing that the lack of genuine interest in the sort of books of which he approved would deprive them of real moral effect. It will be noticed, moreover, that he did not apply to them the rules of comedy as did Fielding in his novels, but rather those of the epic, which, according to such standards as Le Bossu had laid down, should represent perfect ideas of virtue and disapproval of wickedness, that the primary effect may be instruction before it is pleasure.

And yet Johnson's dislike of Fielding goes deeper than this. Not merely the latter's unadorned painting of the natural man, but the easy morality that permitted Tom Jones to follow his impulses without check of any sort and with due reward at the end for his escapades shocked the moral sense of the philosopher. He scarcely knew a more corrupt book than *Tom Jones*, which no modest lady should read, and yet he was able to read *Amelia* through without stopping. He could swallow *Pamela*, however, for he has left us no word of condemnation, and he probably missed the splendid comic interest maintained unflaggingly throughout *Tom Jones;* and he probably also failed to perceive, despite its frank naturalism, the infinite superiority of this kind of realism over Richardson's more minute but more sickly studies of the female heart when under persecution from the other sex. Probably, too, much of his objection to Fielding was for his violation of that decorum

upon which the polite society of the time was built. Fielding to Johnson's mind not only scorned the fundamentally accepted canons of morality, but the tone of his books was "low"; and he quotes Richardson as declaring that, had he not known who Fielding was, he should have believed that he was an hostler. Fielding, of course, was not at all squeamish in depicting scenes of a coarse or indecorous kind, and it is thoroughly in keeping with Johnson's sturdy defense of the proprieties in both life and literature that he should have raised decided objections to this latest complete abandonment of literary convention.

This discussion of Johnson's rather self-evident position on the subject of what we have called the sentimental point of view has been necessary in order to indicate his approach to what is usually known as the romantic revival in the last half of the eighteenth century. A man living in the midst of a gradual change of literary ideals would not be apt to distinguish between the more and the less vital aspects of the movement. Johnson saw the dangerous increase of the sentimentalism which he condemned as inimical to all the institutions upon which he set store; he recognized in the odes of Gray, in the imitations of Spenser, in the popularity of the Ossianic poems, and in the return to medieval literature, certain signs of a revolt from his cherished humanistic standards; and in his nearness to the coming confusion he perhaps failed to perceive how very strong was the current setting in the other direction.

In principle, certainly, he recognized the claims of the imagination, granting to the poet in his moments of inspiration freedom from the restraints of formal rule. "It is not by comparing line with line," he says in the *Life of Dryden*, "that the merit of great works is to be estimated, but by their general effects and ultimate result." His great *Preface* to Shakespeare contains many passages of a breadth of view surprising to those who see our critic through the distorting spectacles of

Macaulay. Here he bids the reader not to let the fancy stoop to correction or explanation till after he has been able to comprehend the meaning and spirit of a work in its full design and its true proportions. Then he may examine the smaller niceties, but only as a matter of second importance. Certainly a most wholesome attitude for an editor of Shakespeare to take.

But that he could at times feel that indescribable power of the grand style which strikes the mind, elevates the feelings, and leaves the reader in a state of exaltation, may be proved by various references to his works. In my comment on the influence of both Longinus and Boileau upon his thinking I have cited passages which substantiate this point. A sentence in *Rambler* 137, already quoted, speaks of wonder as a pause of reason, a cessation of the mental progress, which loses its power as soon as the mind again assumes its proper functions. He admits that works of imagination are often influenced by causes out of the performer's power of control,[1] though he elsewhere restricts his position a bit when he observes that those performances which strike with wonder are combinations of skillful genius with happy casualty. One statement, that the beauties of writing are often such that they cannot be evinced by evidence or drawn out into demonstrations, and are consequently subject wholly to the imagination, comes perilously near to romantic doctrine; it was of course tempered by words more acceptable to the neo-classic mind. Of the metaphysical poets he declares, as I have previously indicated, that the sublime was no more within their reach than the pathetic, "for they never attempted that comprehension and expanse of thought which at once fills the whole mind, and of which the first effect is sudden astonishment, and the second rational admiration."[2]

Johnson's reiterated insistence that judgment and imagination need not find themselves in opposition to each other raises

1. *Lives*, III, 268. 2. *R.* 93. *Lives*, I, 20–21.

him quite out of the ranks of the neo-classical critics. For this is true classical doctrine, which seeks through the discordant elements of any given experience the general principle which governs them all. The neo-classical critic opposed reason to imagination, and the romanticist wished to oppose the imagination to reason; whereas, Johnson, the humanist, denied any necessary opposition between the two and stood on the ground of the moral philosopher in his search for general causes for human action. In this he was in agreement with classic art.

If we put the foregoing beside the splendid attack on the Unities of Time and Place in the modern drama and his continued hostility to all forms of imitation, Spenserian and otherwise, we come to the interesting conclusion that Johnson was no small factor in clearing the way for new forms of literary expression. Simply one more of life's little ironies.

His inexcusably violent and dogmatic assault upon Gray in the *Life of Gray* reveals, however, his uncomfortable feeling that the forces of revolt were gathering headway. Just or not, these criticisms have been hammered out with the heavy bludgeon of the great dictator of taste, and in their complete and detailed destruction of one after another of the poet's most splendid images, they present a monumental example of the dogmatic method in its most active manifestation. Doubtless much malice, a good deal of irrepressible joy in a work well done, and some downright hard sense went into this piece of old-fashioned criticism. The *Life* deserves preservation for its magnificent destructive and venomous power. I have no doubt that he looked upon the "Wonderful Wonder of Wonders," the two sister Odes, as so many glittering accumulations of ungraceful ornaments, magnified by affectation and laboured into harshness. "'Double, double, toil and trouble.' His art and his struggle are too visible, and there is too little appearance of ease and nature." [1] By attacking this "cum-

1. *Lives*, III, 440.

brous splendour which we wish away," and by noting the improprieties of language in the two odes, he has, without question, put his finger upon their great weakness. The declamation and the clumsy ornamentation of their style he traced to the sentimental search for novelty which he also condemned in the poems of Ossian. Without knowing it, he was hitting the pseudo-romanticism, the external trappings which to a large extent these odes represent. But what he failed to find in them is the fine fervor which carries the reader along in a whirl of enthusiasm past all obstructions of conventional imagery. The noble evolution of thought in *The Progress of Poesy* and the dramatic wildness of setting of *The Bard* also escaped his eminently reasonable mind. He who would regulate the poetic imagination by the standard of argumentation and accuracy of detail would be apt to confuse the logic of the mind with the higher logic of the imagination, which neglects precise accuracy for the more important harmony of poetic effect. There must be created a sympathy between author and reader in order to gain a fair attitude toward the work, and this Johnson, trained in the rational school of Pope, refused to grant to Gray.[1] This, however, he was glad to do for the *Elegy*, whose fine classical feeling and appeal to universal human emotions met with his cordial approval.

One wonders if Johnson could under any circumstances have appreciated a sustained lyric effort when one finds him saying, "No poem should be long of which the purpose is only to strike the fancy, without enlightening the understanding by precept, ratiocination, or narrative."[2] It seems to accord with the impression one gains that, however capable he may have been in certain aspects of his criticism, he never could have qualified himself as a judge of any sort of lyric poetry.

1. See *Bos.* I, 403, II, 327, for further expressions of contempt for Gray's poetry. See also *Misc.* I, 191, for a burlesque of Gray's manner.

2. *Lives*, II, 263.

His general truths are salutary and sound, but we may easily see in his estimates of certain kinds of verse how very little able he often was to apply them wisely. His admiration for the following lines in Grainger's *Ode on Solitude* and his exclamation, "This, Sir, is very noble," is a fair sample of his taste in lyric poetry:

> O Solitude, romantick maid,
> Whether by nodding towers you tread;
> Or haunt the desart's trackless gloom,
> Or hover o'er the yawning tomb;
> Or climb the Andes' clifted side,
> Or by the Nile's coy source abide;
> Or, starting from your half-year's sleep,
> From Hecla view the thawing deep;
> Or, at the purple dawn of day,
> Tadnor's marble waste survey. . . .[1]

Here we have ideas as general as you please, clothed in language of chill declamation and dull monotony, but the lines are written in couplets and they violate no laws of diction or versification. The man whose knowledge of nature was limited to Fleet Street, and who when he grew tired of London grew tired of life, might conceivably find solace in such frigidity.

For the same reason that he fell foul of Gray's incipient romanticism, he looked askance at the efforts of the worthy brothers Warton to revive a more genuine feeling in poetic expression. The whole so-called "Graveyard School" of poets doubtless found an unsympathetic critic in Johnson. To his self-contained mind Joseph Warton was "an enthusiast by rule," whose taste was amazement.[2] When Boswell wondered at the long delay in the continuation of *An Essay on the Writ-*

1. *Bos.* III, 197. Compare this with his praise (*Lives*, II, 301) of the tenth stanza of Yalden's *Hymn to Darkness*, as exquisitely beautiful:

> Thou dost thy smiles impartially bestow,
> And knowest no difference here below;
> All things appear the same to thee,
> Tho' light distinction makes, thou giv'st equality.

2. *Ibid.* IV, 39.

ings and Genius of Pope, Johnson replied that perhaps the author found himself a little disappointed in not having been able to persuade the world to be of his opinion as to Pope.[1] Whatever this mildly revolutionary review of the great master of correctness indicated as to the drift of popular sentiment away from him, Johnson steadily refused to admit any such reaction, though the lavish praise which he gave his idol in the *Life* suggests that he must have felt the necessity of some kind of formal defense.

He never tired of parodying Tom Warton's verse. On one occasion he observed that a gentleman of eminence in literature had got into a bad style of late. "He puts," said he, "a very common thing in a strange dress till he does not know it himself, and thinks other people do not know it." Then follow these verses:

> Wheresoe'er I turn my view,
> All is strange, yet nothing new:
> Endless labour all along,
> Endless labour to be wrong;
> Phrase that time has flung away;
> Uncouth words in disarray,
> Tricked in antique ruff and bonnet,
> Ode, and elegy, and sonnet.[2]

This dislike of new or irregular poetic forms is continually revealed in his attacks on them in his criticism. His warfare on blank verse, his perverse slaughter of Milton's sonnets, his attacks on "our Pindarick madness," culminating in the wholesale disposing of Gray's odes, and, finally, his opposition to the imitations of Spenser, were all in varying degrees due to his feeling that behind them there existed a nascent romanticism. Uniformity in verse form and versification seemed to him essential to permanence in poetry.

Despite Johnson's parodies of Dr. Warton's work, he had a high regard for his character and attainments, and no personal

1. *Bos.* I, 448. 2. *Ibid.* III, 158, n. 3.

bias entered into his judgment of what he did in literature, even though there existed an estrangement between them during the last years of his life. "I love the fellow," he said, "for all I laugh at him." [1]

Two famous episodes in the history of eighteenth-century literature, the publication of the poems of Ossian, 1760–62–63, involving the controversy over their authenticity, and of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765, are rather intimately connected with Johnson's name. In the quarrel following the appearance of Macpherson's astonishing forgeries, Johnson was a *particeps belli*, but the history of the quarrel resulting in his famous letter in reply to Macpherson's challenge to a duel need not concern us here. Briefly, he demanded that manuscripts be produced in support of the claim of genuineness; it was, in a word, "as gross an imposition as ever the world was troubled with." [2] Johnson in his tour of Scotland made a strict examination of the evidence, even making a study of the Erse language in his search for truth. "He [Macpherson] has found," he remarks in summarizing his opinion, "names, and stories, and phrases, nay, passages in old songs, and with them has blended his own compositions, and so made what he gives to the world as the translation of an ancient poem." [3] One superb and characteristic remark is to be found elsewhere in his works: "If we know little of the ancient Highlanders, let us not fill the vacuity with Ossian. If we have not searched the Magellanick regions, let us however forbear to people them with Patagons." [4]

It was not, as is often claimed by Scotchmen, through any prejudice against the Scotch or enmity toward Macpherson that he expressed his contempt for *Ossian*, but simply because he did not like the poetry. The declamation and affectation and sentimental indulgence in gloom and melancholy brooding

1. *Misc.* I, 190.
2. *Bos.* V, 241.
3. *Ibid.* V, 242.
4. *Ibid.* V, 387, n. 6.

of which the poems are full met with sharp rebuke from Johnson's rough sense. He classed *Ossian* and *Fingal* among the nursery tales, which many men, many women, and many children might have written; declaring that "a man might write such stuff forever, if he would abandon his mind to it." [1] Completely to abandon one's mind to any single thing would be, to the Doctor's robust sense, to be untrue to the best intellectual life. It was the fatal facility with which such romantic imagery could be put together, the lack of anything like sustained narrative power, and the completely disordered structure of the poem which to Johnson's reasonable mind rendered it unfit as a national epic. To him the poem of *Fingal* was a mere rhapsody, a tiresome repetition of the same images. "In vain shall we look for the *lucidus ordo*, where there is neither end or object, design or moral, *nec certa recurrit imago*." [2]

His relation to the ballad revival needs a word of explanation. Except for his criticism of *Chevy Chase*, in the *Life of Addison*, which is indeed bad enough, he had made no adverse comment on the genuine ballad. On the contrary, he had served Dr. Percy in his preparation of the *Reliques*.[3] Boswell, moreover, once heard him repeat to himself a line from *Johny Armstrong's Last Good Night*, . . . "And ran him through the fair body." *Johny Armstrong* it was which he used as an example of an abrupt beginning in his comment on Gray's *The Bard*, again repeating the first four lines of the ballad for the same purpose.[4]

No, he condemned the modern imitations of ancient ballads, as he condemned pastoral and Spenserian imitations, as useless and puerile exercises. Once, in denying merit to *Fingal*, he exclaimed that he might undertake a poem on Robin Hood that men would believe they had heard from their earliest years,

1. *Bos.* I, 396; IV, 183.
2. *Ibid.* II, 126.
3. *Ibid.* III, 276, n. 2; *Letters*, I, 89.
4. *Bos.* V, 43; *Lives*, III, 439; *Bos.* I, 403.

so little did he think of the merit of the current imitations.[1] He refused to be taught to understand Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*,[2] and whenever modern imitations were mentioned he turned them into ridicule. "The conversation having turned on modern imitations of ancient ballads, and some one having praised their simplicity, he treated them with that ridicule which he always displayed when that subject was mentioned." [3] His remark, "Dr. Percy has written a long ballad in many *fits;* it is pretty enough," and his parody of the poem, are well known:

> I put my hat upon my head,
> And walked into the Strand,
> And there I met another man
> With his hat in his hand.[4]

His own imitations of ballads should be mentioned. The famous Spanish ballad beginning "Rio verde, Rio verde," he translated thus:

> Glassy water, glassy water,
> Down whose current clear and strong,
> Chiefs confused in mutual slaughter,
> Moor and Christian roll along.

When Boswell exclaimed that this was not ridiculous at all, he cried, "Why should he always write ridiculously?" [5]

He looked upon the revival of medievalism in the same way in which he did the ballad revival and the popularity of the poems of Ossian. He confessed shamefacedly to Dr. Percy an immoderate fondness when a boy for reading romances, and he retained this fondness through life; "so that," says the doctor,

1. *Bos.* V, 389. 2. *Ibid.* II, 220. 3. *Ibid.* II, 212.
4. *Ibid.* II, 136, and n. 4.
5. *Ibid.* II, 212, n. 4.

> The tender infant, meek and mild,
> Fell down upon the stone;
> The nurse took up the squealing child,
> But still the child squeal'd on.

"spending part of a summer at my parsonage-house in the country, he chose for his regular reading the old Spanish romance of *Felixmarte of Hircania*, in folio, which he read quite through. Yet I have heard him attribute to these extravagant fictions that unsettled turn of mind which prevented his ever fixing in any profession." [1] This last sentence, so interesting in throwing light on our author's character, gives us the key to his distrust of the metrical romances. He knew how he himself had been seduced by the glitter of romantic adventure and how it had done violence to those qualities of mind which he held in highest esteem — his reason and his sense of fact.

He admitted that there were good reasons for studying the romances, but it will be noted that these reasons were for the most part other than literary: "the fertility of invention, the beauty of style and expression, the curiosity of seeing with what kind of performances the age and country in which they were written was delighted: for it is to be apprehended, that at the time when very wild improbable tales were well received, the people were in a barbarous state, and so on the footing of children, as has been explained." [2] These reasons, historical and documentary as they are, are adequate to induce the stiffest humanist to regard the romances as worthy of perusal.

Elsewhere he is not so favorable to them. In *Rambler* 4, already cited, he gives utterance to a very decided expression of his views. He distinguishes between the heroic romances and the comedy of romance, which keeps up curiosity without the help of wonder, and is therefore precluded from the machines and expedients of the heroic romance, "and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity; it can neither

1. *Bos.* I, 49. See also March 27, 1776. "[He] had with him upon this jaunt *Il Palmerino d' Inghilterra*, a romance praised by Cervantes; but did not like it much. He said, he read it for the language, by way of preparation for his Italian expedition." *Ibid.* III, 2.

2. *Ibid.* IV, 17.

bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles." He then proceeds to account for the former condition of things: "Why this wild strain of imagination found reception so long in polite and learned ages, it is not easy to conceive; but we cannot wonder that while readers could be procured, the authors were willing to continue it; for when a man had by practice gained some fluency of language, he had no further care than to retire to his closet, let loose his invention, and heat his mind with incredibilities; a book was thus produced without fear of criticism, without the toil of study, without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life."

In the *Preface* to Shakespeare, 1765, we have perhaps the best expression of his contempt for the romances. Shakespeare was the poet who held the mirror up to nature, in which men see themselves as they are. "Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbolical or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unexampled excellence or depravity, as the writers of barbarous romances invigorated the reader by a giant and a dwarf." [1] Moreover, when he began to write, "the study of those who then aspired to plebeian learning was laid out upon adventures, giants, dragons, and enchantments. *The Death of Arthur* was the favorite volume.

"The mind, which has feasted on the luxurious wonders of fiction, has no taste for the insipidity of Truth. A play, which imitated only the common occurrences of the world, would, upon the admirers of *Palmerin* and *Guy of Warwick*, have made little impression."

Johnson offered, then, two objections to the romances. First, he believed they tended to lead the imagination into realms of fable, where the bonds of reason were broken down in the general levelling of all standards of truth and of literary form; and, secondly, he looked upon the indulgence in these "incredibilities of fiction" as not only in itself damaging to the

1. *Works*, V, 108, 125.

intellectual life but as unfitting men for accepting true accounts of human nature as it exists today. It would be pleasant to have a vigorous expression of opinion from him regarding the barbarity of the modern moving-picture show in its offense against the canons of taste in both these respects. Here would be a subject worthy of his best powers.

He maintained an attitude toward the heroic drama of the Restoration similar to that which he held toward the medieval romance. He recognized at once its confusion of standards in the exaltation of love over all other motives of human conduct; and in the criticism of Dryden's *All for Love*, he says, "But it has one fault equal to many, though rather moral than critical, that by admitting the romantick omnipotence of Love, he has recommended as laudable and worthy of imitation that conduct which through all ages the good have censured as vicious, and the bad despised as foolish." He notes that Dryden's was not one of the "gentle bosoms": "Love, as it subsists in itself, with no tendency but to the person loved and wishing only for correspondent kindness, such love as shuts out all other interest, the Love of the Golden Age, was too soft and subtle to put his faculties in motion." [1] He could even exaggerate his point, as when, in the *Preface* to Shakespeare, he declares that love is only one of many passions and has no great influence in the sum of life. We have here an indirect condemnation of one of the phases of romanticism which was to gain so much importance in the next century. The glorified passions of Alfred de Musset and of Victor Hugo or the erotic musings of Swinburne would have met instant rebuke from our moralist.

Dr. Johnson has made no specific expression of his views concerning other aspects of the movement, though it would not be difficult to determine what he would have said upon them had he had occasion to do so. In his *Life of Sir Thomas Browne*, written in 1756, he takes a purely sceptical view of

1. *Lives*, I, 361, 458.

his author's sense of his own uniqueness and his study of himself as one of God's miracles. "There is, undoubtedly, a sense in which all life is miraculous; as it is an union of powers of which we can imagine no connexion, a succession of motions, of which the first cause must be supernatural; but life, thus explained, whatever it may have of miracle, will have nothing of fable; and, therefore, the author undoubtedly had regard to something, by which he imagined himself distinguished from the rest of mankind.

"Of these wonders, however, the view that can be now taken of his life offers no appearance. . . . The wonders, probably, were transacted in his own mind; self-love, co-operating with an imagination as vigorous and fertile as that of Browne, will find or make objects of astonishment in every man's life; and, perhaps, there is no human being, however hid in the crowd from the observation of his fellow-mortals, who, if he has leisure and disposition to recollect his own thoughts and actions, will not conclude his life in some sort a miracle, and imagine himself distinguished from all the rest of his species by many discriminations of nature or of fortune." [1]

This is really a reflection upon the romantic sense of wonder and uniqueness almost before it was considered in England, though some echo of Rousseau's extravagances began to be heard not long after. Similarly, he has declared that wonder is the result of the impact of novelty upon ignorance, an observation thoroughly in accord with his life-long hostility to trust in sentiment.[2] What Johnson would have said of romantic Titanism, of romantic and sentimental yearning, of the subjective and individualistic tendencies of the coming age, of the seeking in wild and uninhabited nature for balm to the human spirit, it is hardly necessary to guess. One cannot help regretting that his life did not lie in the midst of the following age, that he might play the stern censor to a Time-spirit un-

1. *Works*, VI, 480. 2. *Lives*, II, 303.

congenial to his temperament and ideals. Certainly, though he might not have been listened to by his generation, his remarks would have been a wholesome gospel to those who came after. That, I think, is usually the great and beneficial office that a moralist and critic of great powers who cannot reconcile himself to the stream of tendency has in the life of the world.

His attitude, indeed, toward any new movement could not have been one of extreme cordiality. In literary criticism, certainly, his position cannot be better defined than in the observation already quoted from the *Life of Cowley*. "Great thoughts are always general," states the classic point of view pretty well. General representations of human nature as the basis of the humanistic conception of art were fundamental in his own literary creed. "The business of the poet," says Imlac, "is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest." And the following, also quoted, from *Rambler* 36: "Poetry cannot dwell upon the minuter distinctions, by which one species differs from another, without departing from that simplicity of grandeur which fills the imagination; nor dissect the latent qualities of things, without losing its general powers of gratifying every mind, by recalling its conceptions." And it is hardly necessary to observe that Johnson's position is at the opposite pole from the romantic search for the exotic and the particular.

Furthermore, and in this respect he reveals the limitations of his critical powers, he possessed little capacity for appreciating the tremendous imaginative impulse which was an essential part of the new movement. In refusing to abandon his reason and his sense of fact to his imagination, he did well, but in so doing he almost excluded the imagination altogether from his intellectual life. If we accept Dr. Neilson's argument, in his little book, *The Essentials of Poetry* — and we may do

so without straying into other fields of discussion which it is not our purpose to enter — that these three elements in their proper equilibrium are essential to any great poetic achievement, we may say that Johnson possessed reason and a sense of fact in a surpassing degree, but permitted them to dominate and far too often to exclude the imaginative qualities. Herein lies his great deficiency both as a poet and as a critic of poetry.

CHAPTER IX

Critical Method

THE distinguishing features of classical criticism — externality, the application of laws founded on reason, and an effective method of applying these principles — are reflected in the form in which its dicta were cast. Merely personal judgments on particular objects of criticism were always subordinated in the critical mind to the knowledge of critical principles and the ability to apply them to special cases; and just in proportion as the critic possessed these qualifications, his literary opinions carried weight and authority. The formation of a judgment based on certain objective standards, confirmed by long practice, extensive learning, and a thoroughly organized critical method, were, then, the essential requirements in English criticism down to the nineteenth century; and upon them many a reputation for insight and authority arose, and lasted long after particular utterances were forgotten.

That Dr. Johnson possessed the first two of these characteristics of a true critic, judgment and learning, I have shown to be true, and that his dominating personality went far toward enforcing his decrees requires no proof. It now needs to be made clear what was his method of approach to his authors in his last great work, the *Lives of the English Poets*, and how strictly he applied his method in actual criticism.

His task was to write *little lives* and brief criticisms of selected poets, whose works the booksellers were preparing to publish. His interest in his subject led him far beyond his original design, however, and his completed work remains the most extended piece of combined biography and criticism that

had yet been produced in English letters. Notwithstanding the standards of criticism which he set himself, his primary interest was in the men themselves. Biography was admittedly that part of literature which he loved most,[1] and his own training as a humanist and position as unofficial censor of morals would bear out his assertion. Literature was to him a means to a knowledge of life; life was greater than literature, which in turn had value to him only in proportion as it taught men how best to conduct their lives in the light of universal experience. Both by training and by instinct Johnson was a moralist before he was a critic.

His interest in the individual writer, as distinct from his work, and his anxiety to keep values in their right proportion to both writer and his literary production, induced him to divide his essay into two parts, with the biographical portion separate from the critical. He conceived of himself as the official biographer of this edition of the poets, and he consequently took care to present the external facts of their lives in chronological order, making such comments and general reflections upon human life and conduct as his strong sense from time to time suggested. His intention was to furnish the reader with all the main facts, and as much literary anecdote as long acquaintance with literary history could afford. These lives, fine examples of old-style biography, lack the carefully selected point of view which a modern biographer would seek in order to throw light upon causes and results of literary production. Non-selective and dissociated from the remainder of the essays, they do not have the inevitability and continuity of interest which give special value to nineteenth-century biography. Johnson was bound by the fact that he was not using a free form, adaptable to the purpose of the writer; and he of necessity chose his materials for another purpose, which was to attempt to tell the story of the lives of his authors without

1. *Bos.* I, 425.

other aim than incidental comment and application of moral principles, in order to place in relief the actual life of the man as his friends and intimates knew it.

His conception of what a good biographer should be is recorded by Boswell, "Nobody can write the life of a man, but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him." [1] Inasmuch as he had not had the fortune of personal contact with many of the poets, he endeavored to substitute for this lack an intimate knowledge of their lives, their characteristics and personal habits, gleaned from all possible written sources and from personal inquiry. In this connection it is worth noting that at the beginning of the *Life of Dryden* he complains that, because of the carelessness of his contemporaries, nothing can be known beyond what casual mention and uncertain tradition have supplied.[2] In spite of a characteristic excuse in the same *Life*, his later lives are full of rich literary anecdote, sound judgment, and wise remarks admirably expressed.

His interest in the individual and his avowed intention of passing judgment upon character led him into great detail concerning the private lives of his subjects; and the lives of Milton, Dryden, Addison, and Pope are made very human in consequence. He has described biography as the "art of writing trifles with dignity," [3] and in this he has succeeded

1. *Bos.* II, 166. See also *Ibid.* 446.

2. *Lives*, I, 368. "To adjust the minute events of literary history is tedious and troublesome; it requires indeed no great force of understanding, but often depends upon enquiries which there is no opportunity of making, or is to be fetched from books and pamphlets not always at hand." See also Malone's *Dryden*, I, 2 (quoted *Lives*, I, xxvii, n. 2).

"Dr. Johnson, having, as he himself told me, made no preparation for that difficult and extensive undertaking, not being in the habit of extracting from books and committing to paper those facts on which the accuracy of literary history in a great measure depends, and being still less inclined to go through the tedious and often unsatisfactory process of examining ancient registers, &c.; he was under the necessity of trusting to his own most retentive memory." *Bos.* III, 359, n. 2.

3. *Ibid.* IV, 34, n. 5.

throughout. His judgments are always sincere, and, except where personal prejudice led him astray, notably in the cases of Milton and Swift, usually sound.[1]

The deliberate moral purpose with which he set out to write these lives everywhere is evident, and his comment nearly always is, in the best sense, a comment upon life. He esteemed biography as giving us what comes near ourselves, what we can turn to use;[2] and as he declares in the advertisement to the Third Edition, he wrote the lives with the "honest desire of giving useful pleasure."[3] He hoped that they had been written in such a manner as might tend to the promotion of piety,[4] a thought never foreign to him during his whole literary life.

Boswell has retained his master's own explicit declaration of the duties of a biographer. One or two sentences deserve quotation: "The business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exteriour appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue. . . . There are many invisible circumstances, which whether we read as enquirers after natural or moral knowledge, whether we intend to enlarge

1. *Lives*, II, 116. "The necessity of complying with times and of sparing persons is the great impediment of biography. History may be formed from permanent monuments and records; but Lives can only be written from personal knowledge, which is growing every day less, and in a short time is lost for ever. What is known can seldom be immediately told, and when it might be told it is no longer known. The delicate features of the mind, the nice discriminations of character, and the minute peculiarities of conduct are soon obliterated; and it is surely better that caprice, obstinacy, frolick, and folly, however they might delight in the description, should be silently forgotten than that by wanton merriment and unseasonable detection a pang should be given to a widow, a daughter, a brother, or a friend. As the process of these narratives is now bringing me among my contemporaries I begin to feel myself 'walking upon ashes under which the fire is not extinguished,' and coming to the time of which it will be proper rather to say 'nothing that is false, than all that is true.'"

2. *Bos.* V, 79. 3. *Lives*, I, xxvi. 4. *Bos.* IV, 34.

our science, or increase our virtue, are more important than publick occurrences. . . . The incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are transmitted by tradition." [1] Here we have authoritatively presented to us the causes of that minute attention to private virtues and peculiarities which Johnson practised in writing his *Lives* and the manner in which he taught his pupil to immortalize him. He even took pains to explain why he painted his characters as they were, without false colors or neglect of form: for "if nothing but the bright side of characters should be shewn, we should sit down in despondency, and think it utterly impossible to imitate them in *any thing*." [2]

The *Lives* themselves vary in interest and in the degree of completeness with which they were executed. The longest lives, those dealing with the greatest names, as Cowley, Milton, Dryden, Addison, Swift, and Pope, naturally received the most minute attention; and, in fact, these remain the most successful efforts of his pen. The *Life of Savage*, written many years before the others, is a kind of *tour de force* of the biographical art, but is none the less interesting as an eloquent apology of a great man for an unworthy friend. Others, those of medium length, as Butler, Congreve, Prior, Waller, Gay, etc., are for the most part clearly and interestingly done; while the last group, such as Hughes, Stepney, Halifax, etc., are but perfunctory summaries of three or four pages each of the chief events of the lives, a running commentary, and a few lines of criticism at the end. Occasionally they serve as a means for the quotation of a long Latin epitaph, a form of

1. *Bos.* I, 32–33.

2. *Ibid.* IV, 53. See III, 155. "Sir, there is no doubt as to peculiarities: the question is, whether a man's vices should be mentioned; for instance, whether it should be mentioned that Addison and Parnell drank too freely: for people will probably more easily indulge in drinking from knowing this; so that more ill may be done by the example, than good by telling the whole truth."

"lapidary" writing for which Dr. Johnson had a particular weakness.

The great *Lives* have a somewhat similar development. After naming the chief authorities for the life, the author gives in as great detail as he is able the early schooling; the public services, if any; the works in chronological order, usually without comment; literary quarrels; the general incidents of the life, including all available gossip and anecdote; and, finally, the death and burial. Throughout the narrative he does not fail to offer his own reflections upon the life and conduct of his poet, these reflections occasionally taking the form of a line or two of general observation upon human life, followed by a specific application to the point in question. Occasionally, a more extended digression gives a larger application to a particular instance. His judgment of conduct is perhaps a bit severe but always sincere. His condemnation of the malignity and "surly republicanism" of Milton could scarcely be quite fair, coming as it did from the great Tory, who believed the first Whig was the Devil and asserted that King Charles II was the pattern for all good monarchs. And his personal bias against Swift was the outcome of an instinctive antagonism to the savage misanthropy of a man who had less cause for venting his spite upon the world than had Johnson himself in his early days of literary drudgery. Johnson believed that Swift possessed a diseased soul, which violently rejected all comfort and deliberately poisoned itself against humanity. Hence his inability to see the great Dean in the fairest light.

Of literary anecdote, apt quotation, and strong common sense these *Lives* are full to overflowing. Milton's quarrel with Salmasius, Dryden's warfare with Elkanah Settle, Addison and Dennis, Pope and Dennis, Pope and Addison, Pope and his other contemporaries, are presented with a fullness and a clearness that should gain for these biographies continued

favor from all lovers of literary history. He has also traced in detail the genesis of *Paradise Lost* and of Pope's translation of Homer, as being interesting incidents in the history of literature not to be forgotten. As ever, his judgments are based on clear insight and sure reasoning: Milton suffers no more than do his favorites, Dryden and Pope; if Milton has been "written down," then Pope's character should never survive the castigation it has received at the hands of his admirer. This work is "done historically," and no favors are dispensed to particular persons.

The habit of moral reflection and the interest in human nature led Johnson to pay careful attention to a summary of the characters, personal habits, appearance, mental qualities, reading, opinions, domestic life, and personal fortune of many of the more important poets. A curious reflection of his own personal qualities appears in his interest in their conversational ability, and his oft-repeated assertion of their consciousness of their powers bears resemblance to his own feeling about himself. By constant quotation and literary anecdote he has maintained the interest of the reader without giving him a dull moment. His method is not primarily psychological, but we have such a rich display of all the resources of a biographer, and the human interest is so consistently preserved, that the reader hardly misses the more selective and less formal method of today.

The lesser *Lives* might be termed condensed biographies. They nearly all prove interesting reading, but they lack the elaborate setting and something of the immense reality of their larger brethren. The method of development is similar to the one just explained, with somewhat less heed paid to a detailed account of private lives and personal habits. And yet they are developed in due proportion to the importance of the subjects. Occasionally, literary criticism intrudes upon the biographical portion, as when some estimate is made of the plays of Con-

greve and Rowe, which indeed had been done for the plays of Dryden and more than once in lavish praise of Pope's youthful work. On the whole, however, little difference in method can be found, other than a general condensation and a slightly more formal presentation of material.

The smallest *Lives* are hardly more than a brief summary of the facts, a dogmatic statement of opinion concerning character, an enumeration of works with passing comment, and a few lines or a few pages of general criticism in conclusion.

As we turn to consider the special aspects of his criticism, it will be convenient to say a word about the kind of criticism the mid-eighteenth century expected from its leading critical authority, and the kind that was more or less inevitable from such a man as he was known to be. By the time that Johnson began to write these *Lives of the Poets* a great body of neo-classical criticism had been built up, had crystallized into rules, and was already beginning to disintegrate before the growth of the new romanticism. Founded on an imperfect interpretation of Aristotle and of Horace, these rules had become an established code of criticism, a consistent doctrine, which was to provide sufficient reasons for all its judgments, however perverse or arbitrary they might seem to be. In the name of truth and nature, the cool common sense of a highly rational age, backed by principles and learning, was to be applied rigidly to works of imagination, and the verdict pronounced with startling finality. Consequently, critical paraphernalia, rather than particular judgments, gave a man his position as a critic. His method and doctrine, his principles and learning and critical dialectic held the respect of the public long after his judgments had been discredited; and these were to make the *Lives of the Poets* the most complete expression of English classicism.

An age which prides itself on the possession of common sense is bound to be dogmatic in the expression of its opinions,

for the consciousness of the possession of common sense is the source of the dogmatic spirit. When a critic is convinced that he at least knows the only true doctrine and that his judgments are a just application of them, he naturally begins to think that his opinions cannot be far from the truth. He looks upon himself as a kind of judge who possesses fixed standards, or precedents, by means of which he may weigh the evidence, judge, and pass sentence not to be reversed. This kind of criticism the English tended to accept in the eighteenth century as the French had done in the century before, and as an age primarily intellectual must do.

The eighteenth century was, finally, a consciously moralizing age. By moral essay, and sermon, and precept, it expressed its views of life, and it valued didactic literature because it definitely expressed itself in this way. It is true that the influence of aesthetic theory, based on an increased regard for the ideas of Longinus and his interpreters, had somewhat modified the emphasis upon the formal presentation of the ethical in art; yet throughout the century this point of view remained one of the prominent features of literature and of criticism.

Johnson came to his task of criticism as the acknowledged dictator of public opinion in matters of literary and moral import. His famous *Dictionary*, the *Rambler* and the *Idler*, and the *Preface* and Notes to Shakespeare had confirmed him in the public mind as the great lexicographer, moralist, and Shakespearean editor of the age. Moreover, he had become the object of attack by Grub Street, a fact sufficient to make the reputation of smaller men than he. His temperament, too, predisposed him to make of himself the most impressive conversationalist of his time, for he "loved to dogmatize and be contradicted," finding in argument and assertion an outlet for his contentious nature. As in his literary criticism, he endeavored in conversation also to found his opinions upon truth

and reason, seldom failing to support his position with apt examples, concrete illustrations, and clear, brief definitions. That is one of the reasons why his conversations are so entertaining for us today. Nevertheless, he was a dogmatist of the most distinct kind, ready to roar his opponent down if necessary. In disposition, then, Johnson revealed more affinity for critics like Rymer and Dennis; greater in nearly every respect, it is true, than either, but with just as great a love for controversy and a disposition to assert his views and maintain them against all comers.

It is entirely clear that he intended to assume the functions of a judge, weighing evidence and pronouncing sentence. As he declared in the last number of the *Rambler* (208) concerning the critical papers that had preceded, he endeavored to say nothing without a reason, and to base his judgments on "unalterable and evident truth." Objective truth was the aim of his criticism; and, consequently, when he conceived that he found it, his judgments bore an air of finality and decision quite consistent with his position as a critic. "The duty of criticism," he declares, "is neither to depreciate, nor dignify by partial representations, but to hold out the light of truth, whatever it may discover; and to promulgate the determinations of truth, whatever she shall dictate."

In a word, he strove to apply the objective and universal standard of truth and nature, not rigidly, but in as fair and open-minded a way as he could. He could even say of Gildon's criticism of John Philips that it was a "censure too dogmatical and violent." [1] His own statement of his intentions at the beginning of his criticism of Pope makes clear his purpose in the *Lives of the Poets:* "The works of Pope are now to be distinctly examined, not so much with attention to slight faults or petty

1. *Lives*, I, 317. See also II, 203, on Prior's *Carmen Seculare*, "I cannot but suspect that I might praise or censure it by caprice without danger of detection; for who can be supposed to have laboured through it?"

beauties, as to the general character and effect of each performance." [1] And this differentiates him from former critics, who sought to tabulate and catalogue, to weigh and estimate as the beam tipped on one side of the scales or the other. With his mind stored with general principles, he preferred to judge great works, "not by comparing line with line, but by their general effects and ultimate result." [2] He repudiated the "microscope of criticism," resolving to "censure with respect and praise with alacrity," [3] pointing to the justness of design and subordinating any strictures on minor faults to the general spirit of the performance as it impressed him in perusal.

The application, then, of general principles to each work of a poet, and a general discussion of its merits as a work of art, was Johnson's avowed method of criticism in his last great work. Just how far he succeeded in carrying out his purpose, and the value of his completed performance, will be considered in the following pages.

I have already described Johnson as a dogmatist in temper, without defining the terms dogma and dogmatist or qualifying my assertion. If by dogma is meant a formally stated and authoritatively settled doctrine, and a dogmatist one who holds and applies such doctrines, Johnson would have been happy to be labelled dogmatist, for such was his endeavor as a critic. If, further, a dogma, according to its modern connotation, is an arbitrary dictum or a doctrinal notion asserted without due regard for evidence, and a dogmatist one who habitually falls into this kind of error, then it must be admitted that Johnson was too often of this latter type. Not merely did he pass arbitrary judgments and make undue assertions, but he assumed the validity and authority of opinions which were in reality the result of his own individual reaction upon his reading. He often constituted himself the authority from which there is no appeal, the tribunal competent to

1. *Lives*, III, 224. 2. *Ibid.* I, 454. 3. *R.* 176.

decide and pass sentence, resting on assertions to be regarded as indubitably true.

Truth was to him a fixed standard and a finished product to be sought and attained, a kind of unwritten constitution, whose articles can be positively stated and strictly applied to each and every case. Nothing like the modern idea of the relativity of truth in matters of taste ever met with his commendation. He has left, in fact, on record a strong declaration to the contrary: "Do not, Sir, accustom yourself to trust to *impressions*. There is a middle state of mind between conviction and hypocrisy, of which many are conscious. By trusting to impressions, a man may gradually come to yield to them, and at length be subject to them, so as not to be a free agent, or what is the same thing in effect, to *suppose* that he is not a free agent. A man who is in that state, should not be suffered to live; if he declares he cannot help acting in a particular way, and is irresistibly impelled, there can be no confidence in him, no more than in a tyger." [1] In Johnson's robust nature one finds no sign of moral weakening, no confusion of standards, or yielding to the caprice of the moment. These words of his are almost prophetic in their criticism of one of the tendencies of the following century, and they leave no doubt of what his position would have been upon certain phases of modern thought. Indeed, he has anticipated in his objections more than one of the problems of the modern era.

In fact, Johnson's humanism solidly rests upon his denial of the claims of naturalism. "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience is for it," he cried, in the same mood as when he exclaimed, "The will is free and there 's an end on 't." These two remarks of the sage contain much, very much food for thought for our modern dabblers in the recesses of our pretentious science of psychology.

After all, dogmatism is rather a mark of temper than a

1. *Bos.* IV, 122.

method. In method Johnson was the judicial critic, passing sentence according to a well-defined body of precedents; by nature he was a dogmatist, loving to assert and maintain his views with or without adequate reason. Dryden, he declared, was "the writer who first taught us to determine upon principles the merit of a composition," whose criticism was that of a poet, not a dull collection of theorems, nor a rude detection of faults, but a gay and vigorous dissertation, in which the poet by the power of his performance proves his right to judge.[1] Now Dryden was capable of magnificent criticism, but he was too subject to his varying moods and impressions to be a very stable critic. Half classical and half romantic, he made the final test of his judgments their effect upon himself. Johnson, when he had to take sides in his consideration of Shakespeare, chose rather to be sealed of the tribe of Dryden than of Rymer; and yet he has more points of similarity with the latter than with the man he preferred and loved. In spite of Rymer's pedantry and his savageness of manner, he and Johnson had many things in common. Both loved pure assertion, both based their judgments on what they believed to be common sense and reason, both possessed strong analytical powers, and both were almost startlingly concrete in their particular examples and illustrations. Here the comparison ends, for Johnson was infinitely greater both as a man and as a critic in dignity of expression, reasonableness of tone, and range of intellect. Johnson's professed care to say nothing without a reason prevented him from long maintaining that supreme self-assertion and scorn of opposition which made Rymer hated and respected for nearly a century.[2] Behind the former's various dogmatic utterances there lurked a definite and well-defined principle, which was based, so far as his particular limitations would permit, upon reason and nature

1. *Lives*, I, 410. 2. See *R.* 208.

and truth. And yet in disposition and method they were not so far apart as might at first appear.

A good instance of his dogmatic application of general principles is the varying degree with which he appeals to time as the final test of the merit of a composition. "About things on which the public thinks long it commonly attains to think right,"[1] he declares; for in the common sense of readers over a long period of years he had confidence. "Time quickly puts an end to artificial and accidental fame," he asserted, when about to enter upon his discussion of Addison's poetry.[2]

So far, so good. The most captious reader will have no quarrel with Johnson's principles so long as he limits them to such safe generalizations as these. It is only when he is glad to agree with public opinion concerning Gray's *Elegy*, and then chooses to take issue with it upon the two great odes, directing at them his shafts of ridicule, that we see that after all, he, Dr. Johnson, is the public at whose hands a composition must meet its fate. The fine classical flavor of the *Elegy* saved it from sharing the same damnation which the odes, so full of romantic and declamatory vigor, met. Johnson knew their popularity, and was the more severe upon them in consequence. That his judgment was entirely wrong by no means follows. Likewise, according to his assertion, the judgment of the public was right in preferring Tate's "revised" *King Lear* to the original tragedy.

Johnson failed to perceive that, if a critic insists upon the verdict of posterity as the test of merit, he must take great care in expressing opinions of contemporary production; and, secondly, that he must allow a considerably longer time than a generation or two to elapse before he can have the right to employ the public as a weapon against particular objects of attack. Cowley had been popular for a long period, and Johnson must still have thought him strong enough in public esteem to

1. *Lives*, II, 132. 2. *Ibid.* II, 126.

deserve the tremendous beating which he administered in the *Life*. Fashions change, and Time plays curious tricks with literary reputations, as the learned Doctor might have found to his own cost had he been able to observe the fluctuations of opinion concerning him since his death.

The general method of criticism, as distinguished from biography, pursued in the *Lives of the Poets*, can be indicated briefly, and further illustrations of his critical habits may be drawn from it. As in the biographies, the method was mainly chronological, each work of a poet receiving more or less detailed attention as the case might require. Johnson looked upon himself not only as the official biographer, but also as the official critic of this edition of the poets, and neglected no detail which would contribute to the completeness of his work. By this categorical method and self-imposed limitation of general commentary he was able to run through the works of each author, applying principles, weighing evidence, and announcing his verdict. It is not to be supposed from what I have just said of his dogmatic temper that Johnson is like a ruthless destroyer, galloping through the pages with a reckless disregard for principles, feelings, and reputations. "Barely to say, that one performance is not so good as another, is to criticise with little exactness," [1] he had declared in his review of Warton's *Pope*. On the contrary, he for the most part is a careful respecter of persons and established fame. Some of his best criticisms are carefully reasoned analyses of literary doctrine as illustrated in the work under review, while many of his longer lives, his *Cowley*, his *Dryden*, and *Pope*, and *Addison*, and even certain portions of his *Milton*, are excellent examples of clear exposition, logical reasoning, and fair-minded judgment. We may not accept some of his premises, and we may object to a certain lack of flexibility in the development of his argument; but we cannot withhold our admiration

1. *Works*, VI, 39.

for the sound sense, the sonorous, often splendidly eloquent, phrasing, and the varied intellectual display there revealed.

He did not content himself with a categorical account of the works of each author, but usually at the end of each life he made a rapid summary of the merits and defects of diction and versification, of both of which qualities of style he considered himself an expert judge; and finally he usually made a general estimate of the qualities — the merits and defects — of his author. These estimates gave opportunities for some of his most eloquent outbursts of rhetoric, and often for his most extreme dogmatic assertions.

One habit, which he exhibits rather too often through the *Lives*, is that of attempting to empty his notebook in support of a principle. Long after he has won his case against the metaphysical poets, he continues to offer example after example, each individually effective, but, taken together, giving a sense of diffusion — the very charge, be it noted, which he makes against these poets themselves. Thus is the effect of a powerful essay somewhat impaired by the too liberal use of the scholar's notebook. Thus, also, does he enforce his critical notes on versification, in this case more justifiably, it should be said, on the ground that in scarcely any other way could he gain credit for his statements. And yet even here we have a sense that in writing these notes he has first consulted his notebook, arranged his examples, and finally unloaded them into the text.[1]

In what I have called the medium *Lives* he follows the same general plan of criticism as in the larger ones, though of course in a more condensed form. As he tended to compress his material he came to rely more and more on mere assertion for the expression of his views; and in the case of some of them he has dispensed praise and blame a bit too freely without the support

1. See, for further examples of this practice, the lives of Denham, Waller, Dryden, Pope.

of adequate proof. We should be glad, perhaps, to see Prior disposed of with less assurance; we might also wish to know why he thought the structure of Akenside's blank verse superior to that of every other writer; and we should like to discover why he was willing to revive Blackmore after Pope and Swift had effectually dug his grave in the *Art of Sinking*. But if one were to go through Johnson's criticism with an eye to perversities of opinion, he would require more space than can be afforded them here.

It is in the "little Lives," however, that Johnson gives freest rein to his destructive spirit. These criticisms of a paragraph or two each, not very ample space for elaborate presentation of argument, will convince one that he had little to do with the choice of poets to be included in the edition. The striking difference between this rapid disposing of little authors and the modern commendation of books for purposes of advertisement, is the entire honesty of the former method and Johnson's indifference as to its effect upon the sale of the edition. Independence of personal judgment was one of his characteristic qualities as a critic. Of Hammond he says that he has "neither passion, nature, nor manners";[1] Pomfret pleases many, "and he who pleases many must have some species of merit"; Stepney "apparently professed himself a poet";[2] Somerville wrote "very well for a gentleman";[3] Granville's poems are damned one by one as feeble and unaffecting, for their author had not "much comprehension from nature, or illumination from learning"; Fenton wrote sublime and solemn prose in blank verse;[4] Duke's poems are not below mediocrity, "nor have I found much in them to be praised"; and the merit of Halifax is that he "sings like Montague."[5]

It is not the comparative justice of these opinions that need

1. *Lives*, II, 315.
2. *Ibid.* I, 302; 311.
3. *Ibid.* II, 318.
4. *Ibid.* II, 294; 264.
5. *Ibid.* II, 24; 47.

concern us here, for most of these poets have not required Johnson's damning criticism to sink completely out of sight, but the magnificent opportunity he has seized to assert his opinions and make them carry by the sheer weight of his own name. He must have taken keen delight in composing them.

If by instinct and deliberate choice Johnson remained a neo-classical critic, his critical vocabulary, the tool by which he shaped and enforced his doctrine, pointed to the past. In reading Johnson one is struck with his amazing command of literary vocabulary, in contrast with the real scantiness and inadequacy of his critical apparatus. It hardly needs remark, it is true, that a man living in an age before the revival of the romantic interest in the subjective side of criticism could scarcely attain any of that intimacy and delicacy and fine shading characteristic of many nineteenth-century critics. Johnson's critical method was objective and his vocabulary, reflecting his mental habits, was naturally external and objective too. Not only, however, does it lack the warmth and color and subtle penetration which only a romantic age, whether rightly or wrongly, can give to its criticism, but it exhibits a narrowness and inexpressiveness within its own limits, quite out of keeping with Johnson's fullness of ideas and ordinary power of expression. It illustrates, I think, in rather a striking degree how dependent even a great writer always is upon the means of expression which his age offers him. Dr. Johnson, the famous lexicographer, could not manufacture a critical terminology in advance of that which the neo-classical criticism of a century had handed down to him.

Perhaps the most noticeable defect of his critical vocabulary is the all-inclusiveness of some of his phraseology and the ease with which he applies terms which should be reserved for the highest expression of admiration. Notably is this the case with such words as sublimity, loftiness, splendor, etc. With the word sublime he far too often couples the word elegant and

similar terms, in a way that seems to indicate that he did not sufficiently feel the difference between them, and that the same poet who is ordinarily elegant may at times rise to the sublime. Thus, Denham's compositions exhibit "the descriptive, the ludicrous, the didactick, and the sublime"; in Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* the "sublime" is mingled with the "pathetick"; some of Waller's lines are "grand," some are "graceful," all are "musical"; the *Letter to Lord Halifax* is the most "elegant" of Addison's compositions, if not the most "sublime." One begins to wonder if Johnson thought very clearly, if he confused the grand with the grandiose, and if he always distinguished between the higher and the lower species of poetical composition. If Prior's *Solomon* was "often polished to elegance, often dignified with splendour, and sometimes heightened to sublimity"; and if the "prevailing beauty" of Savage's sentiments was "sublimity"; if Milton could sometimes "descend to the elegant"; and if there is "no more elegant or sublime funeral poem in the language" than Tickell's *Elegy on Addison*—then indeed we need to coin a new word to express our utmost appreciation of lofty verse.

The general characteristics of the vocabulary, as has already been said, are its externality and lack of individuality. The term elegance, the bane of neo-classical criticism, pervades the whole. A citation of critical terms chosen at random from the *Lives* will illustrate these peculiarities: "inelegantly splendid"; "elegant and poetical"; "sweetness and strength"; "ambition of ornament"; "elegance of diction and propriety of thought"; "vigorous and animated"; "vigorous sallies and sententious elegances"; "very rarely the awfulness of grandeur, and not very often the splendour of elegance"; "lofty, elegant, and musical"; "emulation of intellectual elegance"; "spangles of wit"; "most poetical paragraph"; "careless of subordinate elegances"; "truth is recommended by elegance, and elegance is sustained by truth"; "great vigor and great

propriety"; "elevated and elegant"; "justness of precept and propriety of digression"; "poetical elegances"; "copiousness and elegance of language, vigour of sentiment and imagery"; "something poetical"; "dazzling splendour of imagery"; "every part is splendid"; "splendour of illustrations"; "splendour and gaiety."

Without asserting that not one of these terms is truly descriptive, we may safely say that few if any are more than an external and not very precise indication of various so-called "beauties" of eighteenth-century verse. We do not think that "airiness and jollity" is an illuminating description of the song of Comus, nor do we agree that Pope's versification has made the diction of poetry more "splendid." We are rather led to the melancholy reflection: if the critical apparatus of the greatest of the classical critics is as thin and ineffective as Johnson's has proved to be, how very thin and ineffective must some of the lesser critical vocabularies have been!

The foregoing remarks lead directly to one of the weaknesses of neo-classical criticism, of which Johnson was guilty in rather a less degree than were most of his contemporaries in criticism. This consists in this very discovery of "beauties" and the detection of faults, which are in effect the substitution of a mechanical conception of the poetic art for broad synthetic treatment. That Johnson saw the utter inadequacy of this kind of criticism is proved by his announced intention of general criticism only;[1] by statements like the famous one on Dryden: "It is not by comparing line with line that the merit of great works is to be estimated, but by their general effects and ultimate result";[2] and by his many expressions, already discussed, concerning the qualities of the imagination. But Johnson was never able to get so far away from his school of criticism that he did not sooner or later betray his real affinity with it. The poet Edmund Smith, for example, had "great

1. *Lives*, III, 224. 2. *Ibid.* I, 454.

readiness and exactness of criticism, and by a cursory glance over a new composition would exactly tell all its faults and beauties." [1] Others of Smith's qualities — such as his power of rapid reading, his great memory, and his immense intellectual acquisitions — seem almost a reproduction of Johnson's own; and it is not a far leap to the inference that this account of the poet's criticism is perhaps an unconscious revelation of what he believed of himself. Watts too possessed an exact judgment, "for he noted beauties and faults with very nice discernment." [2] The word "beauties" does indeed occur far too often in the *Lives* not to betray this tendency. This also accounts for the unvarying discussion, at the end of many *Lives*, of diction and versification as separate and apparently disconnected parts of a poem, which may be detached, examined, and replaced without injury to the whole.

To just what extent form may be separated from content, for the sake of logical discussion of parts of a whole, is a question of aesthetics which does not require solution in these pages. Certain it is that the elder critics leaned too much on the side of analysis and tended to destroy the unity of poetical composition. They dissected and analyzed and usually failed properly to combine the various parts of a poem into one complete whole. They failed in the quality of synthesis, which the critics of the school of Coleridge, failing in analytical power, carried to excess. The pseudo-classical description and ornament and colors of language probably deserved just such criticism as they received, for they are, in reality, just those external "beauties" which can be taken apart and analyzed as such. So that the best defense of the criticism of this period is that it judged of contemporary verse in much the way it required for its interpretation.

It is hardly fair, therefore, to condemn Johnson for faults of which his age was chiefly guilty, and of which he could

1. *Lives*, II, 19. 2. *Ibid.* III, 310.

scarcely know the remedy, living as he did before the new era of literature and criticism. One ought rather to turn to the work upon which his reputation as a constructive critic must finally rest, estimate its various parts, and summarize briefly its power and scope. This task I shall attempt to perform, choosing for comment the most significant of the *Lives* and, as my author would have me, adhering to general comment. Perhaps the best of these criticisms is the first in order, the one upon Cowley and the metaphysical poets. This was the favorite of Johnson himself, and with reason, for into it he put his immense analytical powers, producing the lasting critique upon the poetry of conceits. It may be said with justice that Johnson is here knocking over a man of straw, for long before his birth the school of Cowley and Donne had been discredited. Professor F. E. Schelling makes another charge which does not seem so sound. In the introduction to his *Seventeenth Century Lyrics*[1] he has undertaken to prove that Johnson's perverse criticism, worked up out of the critical dicta of others, has involved sweeping generalizations of undoubted defects into salient qualities, without a reference of these defects to their real source. It is true that Johnson approached these poets from a particular angle — that of his lifelong warfare upon literary affectation — and did not lay great stress upon their undoubted merits; but it hardly seems to me quite so true that he failed to assign a cause for their defects, or did not sufficiently appreciate their claims to recognition. Let us hear the critic himself upon this latter point: "Yet great labour directed by great abilities is never wholly lost: if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth: if their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write on their plan it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet,

1. Boston, Athenæum Press, 1899; pp. xxiv, xxv.

nor assume the dignity of a writer by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme and volubility of syllables."[1] This is praise indeed, and should be sufficient answer to any charge of unfairness.

On the contrary, his extraordinarily keen analysis by Aristotelian laws of the faults of this school, and his clear definitions and discussion of wit in its various manifestations, are a piece of applied criticism it would be difficult to improve upon. The real fault, and it is after all a fault of but minor importance, is, as I have already noted, the excessive accumulation of metaphysical defects, the emptying of the scholar's notebook upon the critical page. That Johnson borrowed the term metaphysical and the central idea of his thesis from Dryden is a fact which Johnson would have forthwith acknowledged, had he thought it necessary.

Johnson's *Milton* has perhaps received more praise and more blame than almost anything he wrote, and it is indeed an excellent example of his critical judgment both at its best and at its worst. His strict application of general principles to *Lycidas*, which he dismisses as a frigid and unnatural pastoral, and his bluntness of perception in condemning what he called its harshness of diction; his discovery of hostility to the sonnet form when he brushed Milton's sonnets contemptuously aside, reserving the wrong ones, the eighth and the twenty-first, for slender consideration; his failure to see the beauty of the songs of *Comus;* and his unfortunate remarks on Milton's diction and versification, have to this day brought down on him the scorn of reader and critic. All of these dicta are indeed bad enough and point clearly to their author's critical limitations; but it is to be regretted that they have obscured the real value of his criticisms of Milton, notably in the case of *Paradise Lost.*

1. *Lives*, I, 21.

The natural and inevitable comparison of Johnson's critique of the poem is with Addison's much longer and more detailed examination in the *Spectator*. Johnson, as ever, has held to general commentary and accordingly follows the plan of but the first five of Addison's papers. He has obviously chosen to accept the other's scheme, condensing his too diffuse treatment, omitting the inevitable comparisons with Homer and Virgil, and pointing his observations with greater effectiveness. Like Addison, he discusses in turn the fable or plot, the character, the sentiments, and the language of the poem, applying the laws of the epic as formulated by Aristotle and modified by Bossu, not rigidly but reasonably and sensibly. Likewise, he has undertaken a manly discussion of the defects of the poem, "which it is the business of impartial criticism to discover." He lays far greater emphasis upon the want of human interest than does Addison, and goes into greater detail concerning the allegory of Sin and Death, presenting a remarkable analysis of the causes and effects of the use of allegory as a literary device.

It is needless to make anything like a close analysis or comparison of the two critiques. It is sufficient to say that Johnson has presented the substance of Addison's papers more forcefully, more convincingly, and more conclusively. Not alone do we have confidence that Johnson, in spite of the mechanical form in which his ideas were cast, had based his opinions upon surer grounds and that his were the stronger powers of intellect and of feeling; but we rise from a perusal of the two criticisms with a better appreciation of Milton and a warmer regard for the ability of the author after Johnson than after Addison. Beside Johnson's masculine prose, Addison seems hardly more than a milk-and-water diet. In technique, in strength, in certainty and power of expression, Johnson is clearly the superior.

The real fault with both criticisms is not, in my opinion,

their conventional character, that is, the formal machinery adopted from the accepted principles of Aristotelian criticism. Both maintain, not that certain formulas *must* bring about a certain result, but that they *do* in this particular instance bring that result. This is applied criticism in the best sense. Furthermore, Milton himself accepted and wrote according to these standards and preferred to be judged by them. In his *Tractate on Education* he observes that the art of poetry, which is treated in Aristotle's *Poetics*, in Horace, and the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others, teaches what are the laws of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric; what decorum is; which is the grand masterpiece to observe. So he wrote and so he has been judged, fairly and sympathetically.

No, the faults of the criticisms are not this. They are, first, a failure to recognize the splendid massiveness of the whole, the architectonic quality of the poem; and, secondly, the complete lack of appreciation of the supreme human element in the beautiful pastoral idyl embedded in its central framework. Adam and Eve are not primarily interesting because they are our first parents or because they help to expound Calvinistic theology, but they are themselves human beings, who, in the beautiful Garden, enact their little drama of love and adoration, of sin and bitter repentance. This is Milton's humanity, and this Johnson and all critics before him did not see. But, then, Johnson had a prejudice against pastorals and perhaps would not see.

When we turn to the three other long lives — those of Dryden, Addison, and Pope — we take fewer exceptions to his judgments, and we find more satisfaction in their general treatment. Johnson knew and loved these men and was able to enter into complete understanding with them. If it is true that none but a sympathetic and understanding critic can really judge a poet's or an age's accomplishment, then John-

son should be heard as the spokesman of the age of reason, of literary polish, and of artistic finish. Shall we accept him as a competent judge, or shall we turn to those whose ideas and sympathies are wholly different?

Just as he has made the lives of these men very real to us, he has given us a sympathetic but just appreciation of their work as no one else could do. It matters little in the long run that he exalts Pope more highly than we should be inclined to do today. Certainly we scarcely assent to his fulsome praise of that poetical wonder of wonders, "the English Iliad," nor do we think he has entirely proved his case when he endeavors to defend its boasted elegance on the ground that the poet's aim is to be read; nor again need we agree that Pope's was the "most perfect fabric of English verse," even while we find praise for its exquisite finish. But we do admire the author's splendid eulogy of Dryden's and Addison's prose styles, and are truly thrilled by his famous comparison of Dryden and Pope, in which he confesses to a partiality for the earlier poet. So just are his several criticisms of the works of these poets and so well did he comprehend their moods and intentions that it is doubtful if a century of criticism has improved upon him. Here Johnson was great because the objects of his criticisms required no qualifications which he and his age could not be expected to possess, and because he brought sympathy and appreciation to the task of interpreting his century. There is no better way of approaching the study of eighteenth-century letters than through familiarity with Johnson's commentary and his point of view in making it.

CHAPTER X

Conclusion

As we turn from particular phases of our author's work to a summary of it as a whole, and an evaluation of his accomplishment as a critic, we are confronted with several questions. How far, for example, may he be called a representative of neo-classicism, and what is the value of his exposition and application of the neo-classical creed? What is the value of his individual opinions, independent of any conformity to established principles; that is, what can we say for his taste and judgment? What does his relation to the romantic movement signify to us? What contribution did he make to Shakespearean criticism? What does the *Lives of the Poets* represent, and to what extent does it prove him a great constructive critic? Finally, and most important of all, what is his worth as one of the great humanists, and what is his message to us after a century of progress in literature and criticism? These are the questions to be answered by a brief review of the results of the preceding investigation.

First of all, to what extent did he conform to the neo-classical creed, and how did he prove himself greater than that very narrow school of literature and of criticism? Or, in other words, what distinctions can we make to show his acceptance of the humanistic discipline, which has its value in any age? Johnson by instinct and training was well fitted to become the mouthpiece of the criticism which endeavored to found its judgments upon traditional standards. A man of immense learning, with exceptional lexicographical and linguistic training, and with a remarkably thorough knowledge of both an-

cient and modern literature and criticism, he became the best English example of the classical critic. He based his judgments upon rules evolved from the practice of the ancients, but he was no slavish conformist. In fact, he moved far more freely within the rules than any other English critic of his type. Like Boileau, he accepted truth and nature and reason as the bases for his criticism, and placed but a negative value upon formal laws of composition. In so far as they harmonized with the dictates of reason and common sense, they were worthy of acceptance; but he recognized that at best they were but a conventional check upon license, and that, whenever this convention had become outworn, as in the case of the unities of time and place, they should forthwith be cast aside. One of his chief services to criticism was his independent stand upon the rules when occasion demanded it; he freed Shakespeare from the shackles of the conventions which had bound him for a century and really prepared the way for the more appreciative, if not sounder, criticism of the following century. So, too, his prolonged campaign against all forms of conventional imitation whether mythological or pastoral is as far as possible removed from established methods of criticism.

In theory then Johnson accepted the rules only as they appealed to his reason as necessary checks upon a writer's genius; in practice too he proved himself a consistent upholder of general principles in his various critical judgments. His recognition of genius as something not to be defined or confined by petty laws, and of the imagination as a faculty to be fostered rationally and conservatively, his determined attack upon frigid mythological and pastoral imitations, and his defense of Shakespeare's violation of rules "merely positive," almost mark a transition to a newer criticism which was to be essentially unlike his own. His statement of general principles, in so far as they are in conformity with traditional standards, is so clear and reasonable that, although they had in no sense the

current popularity attained by Boileau's utterances in France, they yet remain the most acceptable exposition of neo-classicism to be found in the language. This is no small accomplishment for any critic.

Neo-classicism may, in fact, be defined as the ancient humanism codified and conventionalized and made formal within the narrow bounds of art. I have continually endeavored to show the degree in which Johnson was able to rise above literary convention, and utter truths of as much importance to us today as when he lived. We are living in a time curiously parallel in many of its aspects to the latter years of the eighteenth century, and we can learn much from a study of a great personality in its reaction from the current philosophy of the day. The various forms of naturalistic revolt — literary, educational, and social — are now, as then, uppermost in our consciousness, and whatever wisdom the older humanists may offer us out of their experience should be welcome. To show that Dr. Johnson is not the least of these has been the purpose of this study.

In certain phases of his applied criticism, however, he remained a close follower of some of the narrowest elements of the schools. The scantiness and inadequacy of his critical vocabulary and his various comments upon diction and versification have been noted. And his tendency to a technical analysis of faults and beauties proves how difficult it is for even a man of great mental gifts entirely to avoid the narrowing limitations of his age and creed.

As a conscious moralist, too, Johnson conformed to established custom in his literary judgments. As in his biographies, he has scattered through his criticism a good deal of philosophical and ethical comment, which is always the result of shrewd insight or deep reflection, though it need hardly be said that to a more modern mind he does bear down too hard on the moral aspect of the subject in hand. Occasionally, as I have pointed

out in connection with his writings on Shakespeare, his moral strictures become absurd, but as a rule his ever-ready common sense saves him from pedantry. His insistence upon novelty and variety as essentials of the poet's art, and his plea for pleasure as the aim of poetical composition, are far from the narrow restrictions a professed moralist might naturally set upon himself. His definition of the purposes of literary composition explains this position, "The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing." This has the proper didactic ring, and perhaps is but an echo of neo-classic theorizing upon the subject of aesthetics; but it also reveals a recognition of the other purpose of art which should be reinforced by other examples more unqualified in their praise of the pleasure side of art. For example, in speaking of Milton's digressions in *Paradise Lost*, he declares that the end of poetry is pleasure.[1] But, despite this sensible handling of the ancient neo-classical problem, Johnson never undertook to judge anything from the purely aesthetic point of view. He considered it the function of literature to teach the correct views of manners and morals and social relations; to repress evil and to encourage good; to vitalize the social organism with the principles of reason and justice. At times, it is true, he gave what seems to us undue credit to the professed moralist with his abstract precepts, in preference to the artist who strives to interpret life through concrete selection of material; preferring, for example, the maxims of Richardson to Fielding's more vital creations. But literature was to him in a very real way a criticism of life, for he believed that authorship should serve as a means of attaining the greatest possible individual and social welfare.

This emphasis on the service of art in the cause of moral betterment deserves more attention than it is likely to receive in these days of shifting standards. Johnson often erred in-

1. *Lives*, I, 175.

deed in his choice of particular objects for praise and in his predilection for purely didactic literature; but after all has been said, more respect ought to be paid to his somewhat ponderous, somewhat over-serious, but thoroughly sincere point of view. It should not be forgotten, too, that the humanist must in a definite sense be a moralist. "He who thinks reasonably must think morally," says Johnson; and if his tendency is to overemphasize this three fourths of life, we may perhaps find it in our hearts to forgive him.

Indeed, there are those who value Johnson for this very emphasis upon conduct and believe that his stalwart conservatism would be the most fitting antidote to our present moral and intellectual chaos. Facing life unflinchingly, he opposed to forces making for disintegration a common sense which penetrated straight to the root of the matter, and roughly handled anything that savored of loose thinking. Mention has already been made of his memorable observations on the freedom of the will, on Berkeley and Hume,[1] and on many other subjects of importance that bring out his steady and clear-sighted philosophy. Boswell is in fact full of these splendid exhibitions of his hero's power to express himself memorably. In his clear distinctions and definitions, Johnson, as distinguished from any other man of his country, or indeed of almost any other, is most like Socrates. He refers directly to this greatest man of the ancient world in a remark that he once made upon certain tendencies in education, which seems strangely modern in its glance at the central problem of education today. Referring to Socrates as the man who reduced philosophy to common life, he says: "It was his labour to turn philosophy from the study of nature to speculations upon life; but the innovators whom I oppose are turning off attention from life to nature. They seem to think that we are placed here to watch the growth of plants, or the motion of the stars. Socrates was

1. See page 68.

rather of opinion that what we had to learn was how to do good and avoid evil." [1] These words ought to bring comfort to the hearts of those who see in modern pragmatic teachings a strange parallel to the instruction of Sophists in the time of Socrates.

The comparison with Socrates, however, requires certain distinctions of great importance in determining Johnson's place as a humanist. Both men were realists, looking at life steadily and without fear of what Truth might reveal. "Never think foolishly," cried Johnson to Boswell; and of course the whole aim of Socrates' life was to rid men's minds of cant. But the foundations upon which their opinions rested reveal at once the divergence in their intellectual lives. Socrates was invariably positive and critical, examining the validity of each phrase, questioning the meaning of every word employed without due care, forcing new definitions whenever necessary, and using his dialectic with the utmost rigor as he proceeded step by step toward the conclusion of his argument. This method must be at the base of any true critical spirit, and it is the most important element in establishing any set of principles upon which a sound humanism may rest.

Johnson, on the contrary, rested his principles largely upon the authority of tradition. He was, in fact, not a positivist but a traditionalist, and therefore fell short of the humanistic ideal. Though seeking in the past experience of man for the foundation of his views, he failed to realize sufficiently that now and then it is necessary to inquire if these traditions have not in some manner been outgrown and do not therefore need revision. His fear of innovation as likely to subvert the authority of tradition, and his failure to recognize the great force of the coming revolution, have placed him with the reactionaries. It is the mark of the Tory to delight in the past because it is the past, and to refuse recognition to possible change which thereby

1. *Bos.* III, 358, n. 2.

might cause a disturbance in the existing system of things. Johnson's Toryism, far more than his pseudo-classical limitations, prevent him from becoming the complete humanist, the critical inquirer into the total experience of mankind as a sane and reasonable guide to life in the present. Therein too he proved his inferiority to Socrates as a moral philosopher, and to all who refuse to rest their opinions upon a mere traditional basis. Neither Burke nor Johnson, notwithstanding their notable utterances in behalf of a true conservatism, has won the recognition that he deserves, because of an undue respect for the past.

Johnson's individual judgments, which do not depend on any set rule or principle of writing, usually fail, when they do fail, either through too strict an application of reason to works of imagination, or through an insensibility to the appeal of certain kinds of poetry. Many of his Shakespearean criticisms illustrate both of these defects. His sweeping condemnation of the odes of Gray is also due to this tendency to rationalization, while his temperamental limitations, and unquestionably some personal bias against the romantic revival, prevented him from seeing the real merit of the poems.

This same habit of rationalization led him many times to overpraise poems which could not easily submit to these tests. Pope's *Temple of Fame*, Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*, Addison's *Letter from Italy*, which "has never been praised beyond its merit," seem not to have deserved all the commendation bestowed upon them. But they have fulfilled the purpose with which they were written and therefore gain his approval.

Many others of his judgments seem almost wilfully perverse, or cannot be explained otherwise than on grounds of sheer insensibility. His remarks on Milton's sonnets have already been mentioned as a glaring example of bad criticism. His finding in *Chevy Chase* "chill and lifeless imbecility" merely shows how deliberately he shut his ears to anything related to

the new romanticism. We might forgive his assertion that the *Tale of the Cock and the Fox* seems hardly worth revival and his censure of Dryden's "hyperbolical commendation" of *Palamon and Arcite* because the music of Chaucer's verse must have been lost upon his eighteenth-century ears, had he not formerly projected a definitive edition of the poet.[1] But these examples prove how really limited were his perceptions, and we need not make any great effort to prove the case otherwise.

Within his own field, however, he was nearly always sure. He possessed in a remarkable degree the ability to put his finger on the crying defect or the real merit of a work of an author, and to summarize his opinion in the fewest and best possible words, a faculty for definition derived no doubt from his years of toil on the *Dictionary*. Whenever he does express his opinions to our particular satisfaction, his criticisms seem accordingly better expressed than similar judgments by other critics. Johnson's quick insight, shrewd sense, and power of expression are among his chief assets as a critic.

This service he has done elaborately for the metaphysical poets, for Dryden, and Pope. He has briefly named the weaknesses of Ossian, of the ballad revival, of Sterne, of the whole romantic movement; he has found the real merit of Richardson, of Gray's *Elegy*, of Congreve's plays, of Addison's prose, of Thomson, and indeed of very much of the other writing of the period.

Johnson stood staunchly by the older tradition in his opposition to all forms of that sentimentalism which was gradually breaking down the restraints of custom and order and preparing the way for new impulses and new ideals. His sceptical

1. *Bos.* IV, 381, n. 1. "Chaucer, a new edition of him, from manuscripts and old editions, with various readings, conjectures, remarks on his language, and the changes it had undergone from the earliest times to his age, and from his to the present: with notes explanatory of customs, &c., and references to Boccace, and other authours from whom he has borrowed, with an account of the liberties he has taken in telling the stories; his life, and an exact etymological glossary."

attitude toward the man of feeling and his acute consciousness of the prevalence of misery, which was not to be remedied by the superficial panaceas of current philosophy, prevented him from subscribing to the rosy ideals of humanitarian dreamers. He looked in fact upon the notions of the sentimentalists as not only false but dangerous to the preservation of order and happiness in the world. A fine example of the Christian stoic, he regarded life as at best a necessary probation for the joys of Eternity. And everywhere he found a loosening of the bonds of the ancient discipline which had kept men within the limits of order and decency. The new absorption in individual sensibilities found therefore an arch enemy in Johnson's oft-repeated emphasis upon general human nature as the only proper study of man. These phases of thought, so foreign to his own thinking, appeared to his robust mind as but examples of the general moral weakening he saw all about him. Ossian, the revival of ballad literature, the odes of Gray, the sentimental philosophy of Shaftesbury and Rousseau, were all in his opinion inspired by the same search for novelty that had broken down the traditional ideals, and seemed now about to set up new and false gods. However single examples of this literature might gain something like praise, as in the case of Richardson, as signs of moral and intellectual decadence they ought, in his opinion, to receive unsparing condemnation from all upholders of the traditional faith. This bias away from every phase of the sentimental approach to life finds its roots, it need hardly be said, in his stalwart humanism.

Johnson's Shakespearean criticism may be considered in few words. The famous *Preface*, which Adam Smith called "the most manly piece of criticism ever published in any country," represents the author's ripest judgment on the poet's genius, a fine piece of destructive criticism of the dogma of the unities, an equally good defense of tragi-comedy, and, finally, a courageous and temperate summary of Shakespeare's defects

as he saw them. Taking the *Preface* as a whole, we may say with confidence that it is the most complete, the most sincere and eloquent, and the justest appreciation of Shakespeare's essential qualities which appeared in England before the nineteenth century. In respect to sustained sanity of judgment, and reasonable admiration for the genius of a great poet, it has not been greatly surpassed since it was written.

The notes to his edition of Shakespeare exhibit at once some of his shrewdest comment and some of his most serious critical blunders. Without proving himself even a respectable emendator of the text, he has by his penetrating sense cleared hundreds of obscurities; he has defined briefly and clearly many unusual expressions; and he has left us a body of wise and sensible comment upon character. At the same time much of Shakespeare proved too fine for Johnson's rational and somewhat unpoetical mind. We have accordingly many unfortunate comments revealing the domination of rather too narrow pseudo-classical principles, and many revealing his imaginative limitations. Yet, in spite of these blunders of interpretation, Johnson contributed not a little toward establishing a sound critical text, and offered some illuminating criticism of character.

The *Lives of the English Poets* has its permanent value, not in particular criticism, however good that may prove to be, but in the fact that it is the most complete body of the older criticism in the language. Moreover, after all credit is given to the *Preface* to Shakespeare for a large treatment of a great poet, it yet remains the finest record of Johnson's principles, of his opinions upon life, and of his taste and judgment in application of general principles of criticism. His various critical papers in the *Rambler* and the *Idler* served the purpose of confirming in him the standards which he was to employ later in the *Lives*, and they naturally lack the vitality and completeness of the last great work. Just as his ponderous prose style cleared itself

and became a strong, even at times clear and simple, means of expression, so his critical principles finally grew more flexible as his judgments matured. His method, as I have described it, was general comment upon the particular works of each author, with statement of principles, summary of results, and judgments more or less dogmatic. This criticism was nearly always external and objective, in contrast to the intimate, subjective impressionism of much of the criticism that has followed it. In a word, Johnson has made in his *Lives of the Poets* a display of the great strength and the limitations of neo-classical criticism with a clearness and a finality that leave no question of its value as a document in the history of literary criticism. In addition, the sturdy integrity of the author's character, and the sheer weight of his personality, have lent it a kind of massiveness and dignity that goes far toward redeeming much of the narrowness and the dogmatism of particular criticisms. After all exceptions to details have been made, the work remains the production of a strong mind, applying its powers to the exposition of the principles of a great system of criticism through the interpretation of the poetical product of the preceding century and a half. In this sense it is both great and significant.

But, when we consider Dr. Johnson's work as a whole, and the power and significance of the man behind it, we feel that he stands for something much greater than as the expositor of a system long since outgrown. Many questions of an acute nature are today demanding the attention of thoughtful men. Our unruly democracy, the necessity of facing squarely the crying injustices of our social system, the evils of commercialism and the tendency toward a warfare between capital and labor, and, above all, the exaltation of material science as the remedy for human ills — all these problems of an unlovely industrial society are becoming more and more the subject of anxious thought on the part of intelligent men. How we shall

with any hope of success meet the vagaries of the humanitarian and scientific reformer; how we shall by counsel and example offer our aid to bleeding Europe; what we shall think of our perilous foreign relations — these are questions that require of us the clearest thinking and deepest pondering of which we are capable. At a time when socialism and feminism and revolutionary nostrums of all sorts have drawn a veil of confusion over the minds of men, it is good to turn to one whose sanity and courage we can heartily accept as a sure reliance in troublous times. A whiff of Johnsonian common sense, a round expression of hearty scorn, would go far toward clearing up many a hazy opinion. Johnson's sound judgment and clear assertion of fundamental principles, his insistence on clear thinking and sound learning, and, above all, his real moral eminence, should have a wide appeal to those who seek some other guidance than the teachings of a generation that has suffered from too intimate an acquaintance with its own maladies to be quite capable of prescribing to itself a wholesome remedy. To such, and to other generations that may be similarly disposed, Doctor Johnson should become one of the great ones of the earth.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

An Account of the Sale Catalogue of Dr. Johnson's Library

THE following is a partial rearrangement of the Sale Catalogue of Dr. Johnson's library published after his death and reprinted by the Johnson Club of London, a copy of which is deposited in the Harvard University Library. In the second volume of his *Eighteenth-Century Vignettes*, Mr. Austin Dobson has already given a charming account of the nature and condition of the Doctor's library. My purpose is to give, so far as possible, in a series of tables, the various kinds of works the library contained. Unfortunately, not more than seven hundred and fifty of more than five thousand volumes have been named in the list. It is to be inferred, therefore, that in certain lines many more titles than are given should be included, for example, in French literature, in history, and in biography. I have thought it unnecessary to include in my catalogue the very many titles in science, in law, in medicine, in religion, and in philosophy. A copy of Boethius (295), published in 1491, the oldest volume in the library, should, however, be mentioned. Many other titles from the famous presses of the following century may be found among the books listed.

Greek Language and Literature

17 Æschinis Socratici dialogi, Horrei.
98 Orationes Æschinis, Lysia, &c. Ven. apud Aldum, 1513.
193 Æschyli tragœdiæ, cum versione lat. 2 t. Glasg. 1746.
199 Æschyli tragœdiæ, 2 t. a I. Corn. de Pauw Hag. Corn. 1745.
618 Escylus trag. 7. Plant., 1580.

171 Anacreontis Carmina — Glasg. 1777.
617 Anacreon Glass 1761.
409 Aristophanis Comœdiæ, Theocriti, &c.
578 Aristophanis Comœdiæ, Biseti L. P. 1607, &c.
222 Aristotelis opera, Auth. G. du Val. Pontesiano, 2 t. Lut, Par. Typis Regiis, 1619.
367 Aristotle's art of poetry, &c.
397 Aristotelis, de moribus, libri decom, Bas. 1566.
471 Aristotelis opera, Græc. & Lat. 2 t. Par. 1654.
479 Aristotelis opera, 2 t. Aur. Allob. 1605.
552 Aristotelis opera, &c.
163 Demosthenis duæ orationes.
372 Allen's Demosthenes, græc. & lat. London, 1755.
341 Demosthenis orationes Lut. 1570.
643 Demosthenis & Æschinis, Principium Græciæ Oratorum, opera, per H. Wolfium, Francf. 1604.
283 Carter's Epictetus 1758.
523 Epicteti manuale, Rolandi, T. B. 1715.
11 Euripides tragœdiæ a W. Piers. Euripides, a J King.
143 Euripidis tragœdiæ, 2 t., &c.
509 Euripidis tragœdiæ Bas. 1530, &c.
292 Homeri Ilias Didymi, Cant. 1689.
410 Homeri Gnomologia. Cant. 1660, &c.
416 Homeri Ilias & Odysseæ, Dydymi. Cant. 1689, &c.
434 Homeri Ilias, Græc. & Lat. S. Clarke Lond. 1758.
478 Homeri Ilias, Eustathii, Rom. 1542, &c.
498 Homerus Didymi, &c.
623 Homeri Ilias et Odyssea, 2 tom. a Clarke, Amst. 1743.
6 Isocratis scripta.
153 Isocratis orationes, &c.
13 Luciani opera, 7 tom. — Baf. 1563.
158 Luciani opera, 5 t.
171 Pindari opera, Græc. & Lat. Mor. 1745.
443 Pindari opera, 1516, &c.
617 Pindar, Gr. 3 v. Glasgow, 1754.
147 Platonis dialogi, &c.
295 Platonis minos, 1531, &c.
345 Plutarchi moralia opuscula, Græc. Bas. 1542.
3 Sophocles tragœdiæ, &c.

150, 508 Sophoclis tragœdiæ, 2 t. Johnsoni, 1758.
407 Sophoclis Tragœdiæ. Glasg. 1745.
305 Theocritus, Stephani, Scaligeri, &c. Lips. 1765.
314 Theocriti, et Evagrii, &c. historia ecclesiastica, Par. 1673.
128 Hobbe's Thucydides, 2 v.
174 Xenophon, Græconem res gestæ, 4 t. Glasg. 1762.
175 Xenophontis expeditio Cyri, 4 t. Glasg. 1764.
256 Xenophontis opera, &c.
440 Xenophontis, de institutione Cyri, Hutchinsoni Ox. 1727.
255 Apollonii Rhodii Argonautica, 2 t. per J. Shaw, Oxon. 1779.

GREEK LEXICONS, ETC.

300 Fabricii bibliotheca Græca, 8 t.
64 Lennox's Brumoy's greek theatre, 3 v. 1759.
93 Lexicon Græc, a Phavarino — Bas. 1538.
201 Apollonii lexicon Græcum, Iliadis & Odysseæ, I. Bapt. Caspari, 2 t. Lut. Par. 1773.
210 Wood's Athenæ Oxonienses, 2 v. 1722.
606 Brudæus in græcam linguam, &c.
432 Micellanea græcorum aliquot scriptorum carmina 1722.

LATIN LITERATURE

346 Georgii Agricolæ opera Bas. 1546.
385 Cæsaris commentaria, Montani, &c.
159 Catonis disticha, &c.
444 Catullus, &c. Cant. 1703.
55 Ciceronis orationes, 4 t. Antv., &c.
8 Ciceronis opera.
136 Ciceronis opera, 8 t. — Par. 1543.
170 M. T. Ciceronis opera, 20 t. Glasgow, 1749.
8 Lambini Claudianus.
165 Claudiani opera, &c.
155, 576 Horatii opera, &c.
168 Horatii opera, 2 t. apud Sandby, 1749.
257 Horatius Baxteri 1725.
391 Horatius Mureti, apud Aldum. Ven. 1555.
435 Q. Horatius Flaccus, Bentleii, Amst. 1713.
544, 550 Horatius, Lambini, &c.

90 Flavii Josephi opera, a J. Hudsono Ox. 1720.
102 Fl. Josephus de antiq. Judaicis Oxon. 1687.
157, 164, 577 Juvenalis satyræ, &c.
196 Juvenalis & Persius, Casauboni L. B. 1695.
36 Creech's Lucretius, 2 v. &c.
200 Lucani Pharsalia, Oudendorpii, 2 t. L. B. 1728.
303 Lucani Pharsalia, Burmanni Leid. 1740.
356 Sand's Ovid, 1640.
507 P. Ovidii Nasonis, 3 v. notis variorum L. B. 1663, &c.
618 Ovidii, 3 tom. Amst. 1701.
620 Ovidii Burmannus, 3 tom. Traj. Bat. 1713.
257 Valerius Paterculis, Burmanni, 1719.
196 Persius. *Vide* Juvenal.
292 M. Accius Plautus, Lambini Gen. 1662.
456 Plautus Taubmanni, 1605.
60 Plinii oratio panegyrica, L. B. 1675. — epistolæ, L. B. 1669.
206 Caii Plinii secundi epistolæ, a Cortio & Longolio Amst. 1734.
306 Caii Plinii Secundi, nat. historia, in usum Delphini, 5 t. Par. 1685.
350 Caii Plinii Secundi nat. historia.
609 C. Plinii Secundi historia, naturales, Bas. 1539, &c.
330 Hampton's Polybius, 2 v. 1772.
79 Quintiliani de institutione oratoria, Ox. 1693, &c.
622 Quintiliani Aldus, 1512.
302 Sallustius Havercampi, 2 t Amst. 1742.
530 Sallustius, per Wasse — Cant. 1710.
375 Senecæ opera, &c.
253 Publ. Pap. Statii opera, not. var. L. B. 1671, &c.
238 C. Suetonii opera Casauboni Par. 1610.
52 Sulpicii opera, L. B. 1654. &c.
114 Tacitus, Lipsii Antv. 1627.
176 C. Corn. Taciti opera, per I. N. Lallemand, 3 t. par. Typis Barbou — 1760.
619 Taciti, 2 tom. Elz. 1634.
168 Terentii comœdiæ, 2 t. — 1751.
425 Terentius Bentleii. Amst. 1727, &c.
445 Terentius Francf. 1623, &c.
555 Tertulliani opera, Lut. Par. 1664, &c.
47 Grainger's Tibullus, 2 v. &c.

194 Valerii Maximi opera, Torrenii Leid. 1726.
5 Opera Virgiliis.
163 F. Ursini Virgilius illustratas, Leov. 1747.
169 P. Virgilii opera, 2 t. fig. — 1750.
238 P. Virgilii Maronis, opera, L. B. 1617.
320 P. Virgilii Maronis opera, par. Typographia Regia 1741.
447 P. Vergilii Maronis opera, Bas. 1534, &c.
554 Pitt's Virgil, 2 v. &c.
585 Opera Vergelii, &c.
621 Virgillii a Cuningamii, Eding. 1743.
626 Dell' Eneide di Virgilio Padoa, 1621.

LEXICONS, HISTORIES, ANTIQUITIES, ETC.

7 Ker de lingue latine.
17 Glossarium antiq. Brit. a W. Baxtero. Aurelia victoris hist. Rom.
20 Grammatica Latina a S. Pratt 1722.
40 Wilson's archæological dictionary.
54 Bibliotheca latina fabricii, &c.
103 Suidæ lexicon, 2 t. Col. Allob. 1630.
132 Roma illustrata.
207 Sext. Aurelii Victoris, historia Romana, Arntzenii — Amst. 1733.
223 Dionis Cassii, historiæ Romanæ, Græc. & Lat. notis Valesii, Fabricii, &c. Hamb. 1750.
240 Historiæ Augustæ scriptores Par. 1620.
298 Histoire Romaine par. Catrou & Rouille, 20 t. Par. 1725–35.
307 Auctores mythographi Latini per Aug. Van Staveren L. B. 1712.
575 Fasti Romani, &c.
586 Desgotdz ancient buildings of Rome, v. 1, &c.
591 Sigonius, de Romanacive, &c.

ITALIAN LITERATURE

187 Hoole's Ariosto, 5 v. 1783.
394, 583, 637 Orlando Furioso.
304 Decamerone di Boccaccio London, 1762.
414 [Boiardo] Orlando inamorato, &c.

403 Castiglione's Courtier, &c.
148 Opus Merlini Cocaii poetæ Mantuani macaronicorum. — Ven. 1613.
549 Baretti, l'opere di N. Machiavelli, 3 t. 1772.
167 Opere de Metastasio, 6 t. Mil. 1748.
189 Hoole's translation of Metastasio, 2 v. 1767.
415 Le Rime del Petrarca, 2 t. Ven. 1756.
490 Petrarchæ opera, Bas. 1554.
128 Tasso's Jerusalem by Hoole, 2 v.

DICTIONARIES, ETC.

565 Vocabulario della crusca, 4 t.
228 Annotationi sopra il vocabolario della Crusca, di Tasonii, 3 t. Ven. 1698.
439 Baretti's Italian dictionary, 2 v. 1760.
189 Baretti's phraseology.
640 Bibliotheca dell' eloquenza Italiana di Fontanini, 2 t. Ven. 1753.
63 Altieri's dictionary, 2 t.

SPANISH LITERATURE

141 Don Quixote, 2 t., &c.
649 Vida Y Hechos del Don Quixote della Mancha, Cuts, 4 t. 1738.

FRENCH LITERATURE

144 Letters de Pompadour, 2 t.
151 Oeuvres de Racine, 3 t.
386 French, miscellaneous.
522 Delittæ poetarum Gallorum, &c.

DICTIONARIES, HISTORIES, ETC.

224 Dictionaire de Bayle, 3 t. Rott. 1702.
313 Moreri dictionaire historique, 2 tom. Lyon. 1683.
67 Shaw's analysis of the Gallic language, 1778.
437 Richelet, Dictionary Francois, 3 t. Gen. 1713.
161 L'histoire de France, 2 t., &c.

2 L'histoire de France, par Mezeray, 7 t., &c.
83 Francheville siecle de Louis XIV.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

12 King Alfred's Orosius.
58 Aschami epistola, &c.
276 Ascham's works by Bennet.
278 Barclay, the ship of fools. 1570.
612 Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, 10 v. 1750.
344 Rerum Anglicarum scriptores, post Bedam precipui, Lond. 1596, &c.
348 Bedae historia ecclesiastica, Cant. 1644.
178 Boswell's Corsica.
579 Browne's vulgar errors, &c.
15 Buchananni poemata, &c.
559 Buchanani opera. Edinb. 1715, &c.
41 Burnet's history of his own times, 4 v.
472 [Burton] Anatomy of melancholy, &c.
263 [Butler] Hudibrass with Hogarth's cuts, first impressions, 1726, &c.
220 Chaucer's works, by Urry, 1721.
356 Drayton's works, 1748.
517 Dryden's poems, &c.
361 Fletcher's works, &c.
129 [Goldsmith] Citizen of the world, 2 v.
269 Goldsmith's Roman history, 2 v.
583 Gower de confessione amantis, 1554.
279 Grafton's chronicle 1550.
326 Gray's poems by Mason, 1775.
209 Hammond's works, 4 v. — 1684.
123 5 vols. of Ben Johnson's [*sic*] works, &c.
177 Dr. Johnson's journey to Scotland, elegantly bound, printed at Leipsig — 1775-7.
494 3 vols. of Johnson's lives of the poets.
628 Latimer's sermons.
627 [Lydgate] The fall of Princes, B. L. 1554.
285 Andrew Marvell's works, by Thompson, 3 v. 1776.
162 Masoni Caractacus, &c.
133 Mori opera, &c.

474 The works of Sir Thomas More, 1557, &c.
271 5 volumes of Pope's works.
184 Rhapsody on Pope.
369 Robert of Gloucester's chronicle, 2 v. Oxon, 1724.
500 [Richardson] 12 vols. of Clarissa, Eng. and Dutch.
29 Warton's Spencer, 2 v.
268 Spencer's works, 6 v.
596 Spenser's fairie queen, &c.
45 Grey's notes on Shakespear, 2 v., &c.
131 Warburton's Shakespeare, 8 v.
261 Remarks on Shakespeare, &c.
353 Shakespear's plays 1664.
467 Shakespeare's comedies, histories, and tragedies 1623.
493 Stockdale's Shakespeare, 1784. Revisal of Shakespeare's text — 1765.
516 12 vols. of Shakespeare's.
431 Smart's poems 1752.
217 Stow's survey of London, 2 v. 1754.
267 Swift's works.
535 Warton's history of English poetry, vol. 1st. Lloyd's poems.
270 Wesley's journal, 5 v.

RENAISSANCE SCHOLARS, ETC., NOT OTHERWISE CATALOGUED

108 Bas. opera, Græc. 1551.
109 Basilii opera, Græc. & Lat. 2 t. Par. 1638.
230 Basilii fabri thesaurus eruditionis scholasticæ, Lips. 1696.
18 P. Bembi episto, antiq. sacræ veterum.
15 Casauboni hierocles.
536 Casauboni epistolæ, &c.
258 Erasmi opera, 4 t.
571 Erasmi novum testamentum Bas. 1527, &c.
365 Fabricii opera, &c.
5 Grotius de jure & belli, &c.
9 Thesaurus criticus a Grutero, 6 t.
142 Halleri prælectiones, 3 tom. &c.
140 Huetius de interpretatione, &c.
147 Hieroclis aurea carmina.
427 Lambinus, de laudibus literarum. Antv. 1564, &c.

593 Lipsii opera, 5 t.
543 Philostorgii opera, &c.
146 Salmasii opera, 9 t.
173 Scaligenana, 2 t. Amst. 1740, Menagiana, 4 t., &c.
208 Sext. Pompei Festi et M. Verri Flacci de significatione verborum, Scaligeri, Ursini & Augustini, notis — Amst. 1700.
448 Observationes in numismata Spanhemii, C. B. 1691, &c.
466 Spanhemii opera L. B. 1701.
114 Concordantiæ testamenti novi Stephani — 1594.
226 Stephani Thesaurus Linguæ Latinæ, 4 t. in 3, 1734.
422 Herodiani historia, Stephani 1581.
450 Xephilinus, Stephani, Lut. 1551, &c.
366 Hieronomi Vidæ poemata, &c.
293 Vossi dissertationes de septuaginta interpretibus, H. C. 1661.
294 Vossi commentaria rhetorica, L. B. 1630, &c.
339 Vossi epistolæ, 1690.
400 Vosii de septuaginta interpretibus, &c.
423 Vossii dissertationes Amst. 1642, &c.
455 Vossius de vitiis sermonis, Amst.
458 Vossius de rhetorica arte, &c.
523 Vossius de arte poetica — Amst. 1647.
537 Vossii, de mathematicis scientiis Amst. 1750, &c.

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